Sandwell
CHRONICLE

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Millions paid out for negligence claims in one year

£8.7m BLUNDERS BILL FOR TRUST

Report by Alex Ross

MEDICAL blunders at Sandwell General Hospital and City Hospital in Birmingham led to almost £9 million in payouts and associated costs in just one year.

A total of £8.7m – of which £4.8m were compensation payments – was paid out on behalf of Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust for clinical negligence claims in 2016/17, new figures have revealed.

The remainder of the money paid out on behalf of the trust for negligence claims went to defence and claimant costs.

Some of the payouts go back to cases many years ago.

The trust, however, saw its bill drop significantly from £14.4m in 2015/16.

NHS Resolution funds the total cost of clinical negligence claims dating from 1995 on behalf of health trusts.

It replaced the NHS Litigation Authority this year.

Healthcare

Elsewhere in the Black Country, The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, which runs Russells Hall Hospital, had a total bill of £9.6m paid over 2016/17, up from £5.6m the year before.

The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, which runs New Cross Hospital, saw its bill increase from from £3m in 2015/16 to £11.9m in 2016/17.

Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, which runs Walsall Manor, had a bill paid of £6.7m in 2016/17, down from £15.3m the year before.

At Dudley & Walsall Mental Health Partnership Trust, just £20,740 was paid out in 2016/17, down from £109,193.

Rob Quarmby, Black Country Lib Dem party campaigner, said: "The costs of clinical negligence claims are spiralling at a time of immense financial pressures on our NHS, taking scarce resources away from frontline services and patients.

"Every pound that is spent on lawyers a pound less we can spend on the NHS

"It really is that simple. Health bosses need to do more to deal with this."

READY, TEDDY, GO – AND HERE'S OUR TOP CAT

Chilling – Teddy just loves to lie in the dovecote

WELL here he is – by popular request – our Animal Crackers winner Teddy.

Over the weeks of our competition for the best pet photograph we had more than 500 entries and in the reader vote Teddy came out well on top.

Here he is in a dovecote and his owner Vicky Sterrett said this is just one of the places he likes to squeeze into. Vicky, from Bloxwich, said Teddy found her four years ago, arriving on her doorstep as a stray.

She found that he wasn't microchipped and was about four years old. Vicky fell in love instantly and decided to keep him.

Cheeky

He has a cheeky personality and is a very busy boy spending most of his time in the garden, in the greenhouse and of course the dovecote. This was specially made by a carpenter at a local day care centre for adults with learning disabilities.

It was originally put there for the birds and squirrels but not long after having it Teddy started using it as his hiding place.

In the late summer of 2015 he arrived home dragging his right back leg. After an emergency dash to the vets Vicky was told that he had been hit by a car and had a dislocated right hip which required surgery to repair the damage.

After excellent service from the vet and several weeks of TLC Teddy was back on his feet and was awarded Pet of the Month at the vets with his picture adorning the surgery wall.

"We have always thought he was a superstar and winning this competition has proved that other people think so as well," said Vicky.

"After speaking to Teddy we have decided to donate the £100 prize money to Walsall & Wolverhampton Cats Protection for all the amazing work they do," Vicky added.

LEISURE

Hopes high as ropes centre reopening due

THE popular High Ropes adventure activity attraction at Sandwell Valley is to reopen in the spring – when it is to be rebuilt following an arson attack.

The fire in March destroyed the adventure facility near Sandwell Park Farm. Now after support from the council's urban design and risk and insurance sections and staff from the Sandwell Valley Country Park the attraction will be up and running again.

The high ropes soar 40ft above the park and the course includes a climbing tower, bridges and a high-speed zip wire.

Councillor Paul Moore said: "This is great news because I know how popular this attraction was."

PLANNING

Demolition of 'tired' office block on way

A TIRED and out-of-date office block in West Bromwich has been approved for demolition to start in March.

Sandwell Council is planning to demolish Shaftesbury House, on West Bromwich High Street, and redevelop the site.

Regeneration chief, Councillor Paul Moore, said: "This disused office block is surplus to the council's requirements. This is part of an ongoing programme to deal with several redundant council-owned properties and sites which are no longer needed for operational use."

POLITICS

MP calls for shake-up on UK asylum offices

A MAJOR shake-up is needed in the UK's asylum offices after claims staff are being overworked, a Black Country MP has said.

John Spellar called for urgent action after whistleblowers claimed workers in the Home Office's asylum directorate were operating in a 'constant state of crisis'.

The Labour MP for Warley said: "The root cause is the while rotten ethos of the place. It needs a major shake-up from top to bottom."

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CONTENTS

TALKING POINT	6
LETTERS	7
THE TICKET	17
TV LISTINGS	20-21
SPORT	27-28

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Rare novels book in for £20k plus

Star book at sale

A COLLECTION of rare novels by HG Wells has sold for more than £20,000 at a Black Country auction house – nearly four times its valued price.

The 19 first-edition novels by the science fiction writer totalled £20,240 – with the star of the sale a 1908 first edition of Wells' 'The War in the Air' which sold for £7,500.

The books were sold at Cuttlestones' specialist collectors' sale at Wolverhampton Auction Rooms, with a number of individual tomes selling for several thousands of pounds.

A book specialist from the auction house said they had expected the collection to fetch around £5,000.

'The War in the Air', published by George Bell and Sons was in its rare original dust jacket with blue cloth binding, gold lettering, two pages of adverts at back and along with a story removed from 'The Strand' Magazine 1909 by Wells called 'My First Aeroplane (Alauda Magna)'.

The second most sought-after book – fetching £4,500 – was a first edition copy of Wells' 'Kipps the Story of a Simple Soul'. Published by Macmillan and Co in 1905, the first printing edition was presented in its original green cloth binding and what the auction house said appears to be its rare original dust jacket with Macmillan monograph and 'Six shillings' on the spine.

It wasn't just books that performed well at the sale – another interesting lot in the form of a fragment of vestment with a note attached stating 'Part of the vestment of John Wickliffe, Rector of Lutterworth circa 1370' sold for £450.

Relating to the influential dissident within the Roman Catholic priesthood, nothing like this had ever come up at auction making it impossible to value.

Traveller camps in borough down 60pc

ILLEGAL traveller camps in Sandwell fell by 60 per cent in 2017 after tough new measures were brought in by the council.

Sandwell Council dealt with 34 camps this year, compared with 85 in 2016.

Economy boss Paul Moore welcomed the fall, saying the new measures have had a 'major impact'.

The measures taken have seen Sandwell Council build a transit site, bring an injunction against a traveller family and 17 council sites, and secured further sites from trespassing.

Councillor Moore, said: "The action we've taken to reduce the number of unauthorised encampments in Sandwell has had a major impact – to see the number of encampments fall so drastically tells us what we're doing is having a real effect.

"Not only does this issue cause real worry and concern for our communities, it was also costing the council around £250,000 a year."

Sandwell Council introduced a transit site in Boulton Road, Smethwick, in September – marking the first of its kind in the West Midlands.

It brought in new powers which allows police to move travellers immediately onto the site from illegal camps. Those that refuse face being banned from the borough for three months.

Transport terror team may be based in Brum

BRITISH Transport Police (BTP) counter-terrorism officers may be based in the West Midlands for the first time from next year.

The national force that polices railways and light-rail systems is in the process of recruiting 170 firearm and 'behavioural detection' officers to be based in Birmingham or Manchester.

BTP firearms units are currently based in London but have been patrolling trains and stations in the West Midlands this year. A base for the new unit has not yet been confirmed. It will also include support dogs, specialist equipment, vehicles and staff to support the operations.

Assistant chief constable Alun Thomas said: "Although our firearms units are currently based in London, they have been regularly patrolling trains and stations in places such as Manchester and Birmingham since early this year.

Patrolling

"You may have seen them on trains, or at high profile events like the UEFA Champions League Final in Cardiff.

"But in the current climate, we know how important it is to make sure we have specialist and highly-trained officers in the right place at the right time to keep people safe, which is why we are looking to recruit even more people."

Armed police officers began patrolling trains in the West Midlands in May.

They were called upon in the immediate aftermath of terrorist incidents in London and Manchester, and to events including the UEFA Champions League Final in Cardiff.

ACC Thomas added: "We want the public to be reassured that wherever they go on the rail network, we have highly trained people there to protect them if needed.

"By basing new officers in the Midlands and the North, it allows us to make that an absolute reality. We want to recruit specialist officers, to work in this specialist environment."

'Garden shed' tram back on track

The restored Tram 5 is now back in action at the museum

A 100-YEAR-OLD tram once used as a garden shed is back on the tracks at The Black Country Living Museum.

Tram 5 is now operating at the attraction after a £75,000 overhaul.

The single-decker tram was built in 1920 at the works of the Electric Traction Company in Tividale and operated in the Dudley and Stourbridge area.

Thirty-one trams of the same design were constructed at the works and Tram 5 is one of only a handful that survived.

In the 1970s, Tram 5 was discovered in a garden in the Kate's Hill area where it was used as a shed and garden house. It was donated to the museum in 1974 and, after a lengthy restoration, started operating there in 1980. Its latest restoration has seen it back in action.

A statement on the site Facebook page said: "After lots of TLC and hard work our nearly 100-year-old Tram 5 is back in service."

Theatre assistant in winning role

A LEARNING assistant at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre has won a Black Country business award.

Libbie Doyle, aged 25, works as a creative learning assistant at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre. She was named Young Person or Apprentice of the Year at a Black Country Chamber of Commerce Award,

Libbie is a former apprentice at City of Wolverhampton College. And as part of her apprenticeship, she combined working for the theatre with studying for a Level 2 diploma in creative arts.

Libbie, from Wombourne, said: "I chose an apprenticeship as I wanted to learn on-the-job rather than in a classroom and I was able to study modules that would be most beneficial to me in my role."

£15k animals aid

A SAFARI park is celebrating fundraising success in 2017 with more than £15,000 raised for animal charities.

West Midland Safari Park, based in Bewdley, has dished out the money to various animal charities and projects chosen for the vital work.

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Jobs saved as Toys R Us agrees to pension deal

RETAILER Toys R Us looks to have staved off the threat of administration after a key creditor agreed to a restructuring plan that will secure around 2,500 jobs.

The beleaguered retailer's proposal for a company voluntary arrangement (CVA) was voted through last Thursday after it obtained the backing of the Pension Protection Fund (PPF).

However, while the CVA will allow Toys R Us to stay afloat, at least 26 loss-making UK stores will shut as part of the restructure, meaning up to 800 jobs will be lost.

Without the PPF's backing, the collapse of the CVA restructuring plan would have pitched Toys R Us into administration, with the potential loss of 3,200 jobs before Christmas

Although the Meole Brace shopping centre branch in Shrewsbury is slated for closure next year, the deal saves the stores at Birchley Island in Oldbury, at Merry Hill and in Stafford.

Malcolm Weir, the PPF's director of restructuring and insolvency, said: "We can confirm that an agreement has now been reached."

Toys R Us said 98 per cent of its creditors voted in the favour of the CVA. Steve Knights, managing director of Toys R Us UK, said: "We are pleased to have secured the support of our creditors and will be working closely with them in the months ahead."

Councils have the power to up bills

COUNCILS in the Black Country and Staffordshire could raise council tax by up to 5.99 per cent after a Government cap was increased.

Many local authorities had already touted rises – now they have been given the flexibility to go even further.

Communities secretary Sajid Javid announced that all councils could increase council tax by up to 2.99 per cent – raising the cap by one per cent.

Those in charge of social care, which includes the four Black Country councils and Staffordshire County Council, could levy a further 2.99 per cent to be ring-fenced for care funding.

Sandwell Council leader Councillor Steve Eling said: "We cannot comment until we have looked in fine detail."

MP's help surgery

WARLEY Labour MP John Spellar will host advice surgeries at the Community Hall in Pound Road, Oldbury on January 5 at 5pm and at Smethwick Council House on January 6 between 8.30am and 11am.

Poo-em tells of cancer screening

A PATIENT is putting pen to paper to raise awareness of bowel cancer screening – by writing a light-hearted poem about her experience.

Lynne Conroy, 63, of Tipton, penned the poetry after she underwent a colonoscopy at Sandwell Hospital. She had taken the "poo in the post" test and after the results showed up some irregularities, the mother-of-three was called in for a further examination.

During the procedure two polyps were removed and she was given the all-clear by doctors. But Lynne she was so impressed with her treatment decided to write about it.

Lynne, who works as an office manager for JLKare and Support, said: "I love writing poems. So when I was asked to give some feedback about the treatment and care at the hospital, I thought I would do it in poetry form.

"It's a light-hearted way of raising awareness of a very important test, which can ultimately be life-saving. Even if this encourages just one person to take the 'poo in the post' test, then I have done something good."

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, people over the age of 60 are invited to take part in bowel cancer screening every two years.

The national screening programme uses a home test called a Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT), which looks for hidden blood in poo.

Lynne added: "It's a very straightforward and easy procedure that you just do at home."

Clair Millard, Specialist Screening Practitioner for the Bowel Cancer Screening programme, said: "It's the first time we have ever feedback in poetry form and we're really impressed."

My Colonoscopy by Lynne Conroy

Lynn Conroy

Do I need to mention the day before?
Drinking Klean Prep was such a chore!
To clean out my innards and make it clear,
for the camera to go – straight up my rear!
I chose to be awake so I could see it on telly,
In a foetal position on my side and belly.
Up went the camera – no chance to be shy.
"Just a couple of polyps," thank God, I won't die.
The crew were professional, the tube went in deep.
With gas and air on tap, I never made a peep.
There are no malignancies; all was fine.
Just two bits of diverticular in my intestine.
They made sure I was fine before I went home.
In the future they'll do this procedure by Drone!
Dr Mohammad and his team all played their part,
So I'd like to thank them all from the bottom of my heart.

Games on! Praise as city named 2022 hosts

POLITICIANS and celebrities have hailed the decision to award the Commonwealth Games to the West Midlands – as Birmingham was officially declared the 2022 host city.

Theresa May and Sir Lenny Henry were among those to congratulate the Midlands after confirmation of the successful bid.

While the majority of sporting events will be held in and around Birmingham, it was also revealed one of the main spectacles of the event, cycling, will be in London.

There will be some benefits for the Black Country and Staffordshire, with swimming and diving to be held at a purpose-built aquatics centre in Smethwick and mountain biking earmarked for Cannock Chase.

Birmingham's Alexander Stadium will undergo an expansive revamp to become a 40,000 seater stadium.

Villa Park, the NEC and Arena Birmingham are among other venues that will be used. However, cycling will take place in the capital as there is no suitable velodrome in the Midlands.

Commonwealth Games Federation President Louise Martin confirmed cities from Malaysia, Canada and Australia had shown an interest in hosting the competition but were not yet ready.

However, despite there being no rival bids, she said Birmingham had 'earned the right' to host the Games.

Dudley-born comic Sir Lenny Henry spoke of his pride at the prestigious event coming to the Midlands.

He said: "Bringing the Commonwealth Games to Birmingham will help boost the profile of a city which should not just be recognised on a national scale, but deserves to be a name that resonates around the world."

The Prime Minister also tweeted her congratulations, while West Midlands Mayor Andy Street said: "The Games will provide the opportunity to not only see world-class sport but bring economic and social benefits."

Bus roof torn off in bridge crash

The aftermath of the double-decker bus crash. Photos: @wmasbenpallante

THE roof of a double-deck bus was ripped clean off in a collision with a railway bridge.

Witnesses described an "incredible bang" as the National Express West Midlands bus smashed into the bridge near Cadbury World in Bournville, cleaving the roof from the upper deck and leaving it lying on the road. The scene on Bournville Lane was left strewn with debris from the topless double-decker, which was not carrying passengers at the time.

Images showed the bus parked up in front of a row of houses, its roof gone but all the seats seemingly intact. The driver was unhurt. Police, paramedics and the fire service were quickly on the scene. A West Midlands Ambulance Service spokeswoman said: "Thankfully, there were no passengers on the bus at the time. The driver, a man in his 30s, was checked over by ambulance staff but was uninjured.

"It was lucky that the bus was empty as it could've resulted in a very serious or fatal incident."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cider maker adds to list of awards

ASTON Manor Cider has won a new series of awards to bring its total for 2017 to 29.

The Birmingham-based independent cider maker was successful in the International Bottle and Packer Awards. It won a gold medal for Kingstone Press Wild Berry, silver for Kingstone Press Classic Apple and Friels First Pressed Vintage and a diploma for Knights Malvern Oak.

The latest awards come at the end of a record-breaking harvest for the business after a significant investment programme. All of the 400,000 new trees yielded for the first time this year.

Cyclists in saddle to collect £400

A CYCLING club raised more than £400 for the Birmingham Children's Hospital Charity, by donning festive dress and riding around the city.

Nine members Handsworth Community Cycle Club, a group affiliated to the charity Cycling UK, took to the streets, on Saturday, December 2, setting off from the Oakland Centre, riding on to St Philip's Cathedral and then the hospital, finishing up with a visit to the Christmas lights

The five-mile route took five hours due to stoppages for pictures and collecting donations.

Furniture stores' split creates jobs

A FURNITURE and bed shop has split into two stores at a retail park, creating six jobs.

Bensons for Beds and Harveys have opened the separate branches at the Gallagher Shopping Park in Wednesbury.

Sandwell Mayor Councillor Ahmadul Haque performed the opening ceremony.

Both retailers are run by Steinhoff UK.

Chief executive Stuart Machin said: "We're really excited about the opening of our new stores in Wednesbury."

Prog icons Camel to play Birmingham gig

PROG icons Camel perform in Birmingham next year.

The Surrey rockers will perform their 1976 album Moonmadness in full, plus other classic numbers. They are Birmingham Town Hall on September 14. Tickets are £41.50 to £128 for VIP.

Other songs they are known for include Lady Fantasy, Never Let Go, Rhayader Goes To Town, Mystic Queen and A Song Within A Song.

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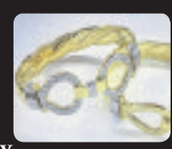
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Atomic Ned pair at literary event

NED'S Atomic Dustbin frontman Jonn Penney will perform a show in Wolverhampton as part of the city's Literature Festival.

He will be joined at the Slade Room event by fellow band member Rat, Ned's Atomic Dustbin's guitarist.

Entitled Jonn's Atomic Memoir Won't Write Itself, the show will see the pair perform 'newly interpreted acoustic versions' of their songs.

In between musical numbers, audience members are invited to ask questions.

The event will take place on January 27. Tickets are now on sale, priced at £14.30.

Business festival tickets available

TICKETS to confirmed events being run as part of a new business festival will be available from its website from January 15.

The Black Country Business Festival, run in association with the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and supported by the University of Wolverhampton and Talbots Law, will run between April 23 and May 4.

Around 100 events are expected to take place over the festival fortnight.

For information, to apply to run an event, or for tickets from January 15, visit www.blackcountrybusinessfestival.com or email hello@blackcountrybusinessfestival.com

Scottish frolics at Burns Night

A BRUM pub is holding a literary-themed Burns Night in January.

The Gunmakers Arms in Bath Street will be offering Scottish short stories and poetry on January 25 from 7pm to 9pm. David Wake will read from Crossing The Bridge, his new political thriller with a Scottish edge, which is being launched on the night.

Free tickets need to be booked in advance from www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/burns-night-tales-tick ets-41367347851

£10k raised for Burma refugees

ALMOST £10,000 has been raised by a Muslim group in aid of refugees fleeing Burma. Charity Wolverhampton Muslim Forum held a fundraiser at Lea Road United Reform Church for the Rohingya refugees.

The event included food stalls, a bouncy castle and raffles. In attendance was Deputy Mayor Phil Page and Deputy Mayoress Elaine Hadley.

Staff step up to help Feed a Family call

Ali Mantle, Rob Colbourne, Jo Mellor and Tracy Caizzo from People

A LEADING training provider rallied around to support the Express & Star's Feed a Family This Christmas appeal.

Staff at Performance Through People (PTP) collected food, toiletries and other essentials to help support a number of food banks and other good causes across the region to ensure that families didn't feel the pinch over the festive season.

Our appeal was backed from employees at the company who donated festive items such as scarves and gloves, as well as basics such as canned goods, pasta and long life milk.

Gill Durkin, business development director at PTP, which has five training centres including ones in Walsall, Cannock and Wolverhampton, said they were excited to be continuing their support for local food banks.

"As a business we are keen to support the local communities we serve, and have contact with a number of food banks supporting clients that may have access to some of our courses. Our employees have been fantastic donating presents such as scarves, hats and gloves as well as non-perishables. and toiletries – they think it is a fantastic cause and we are pleased to support it," she added.

Overwhelmed by your kindness in our appeal

THE final delivery of your generous donations for the Express & Star's Feed A Family This Christmas appeal has been made, bringing some much-needed festive cheer to the community.

We have been completely overwhelmed by the kindness shown by people across the Black Country and Staffordshire during the six-week campaign.

In total, we've had in excess of 12,000 items donated by readers, ranging from food and toiletries to children's toys and winter clothing.

We've received mountains of festive food, such as mince pies, chocolates and Christmas puddings, as well as basics including canned goods, long-life milk, fruit juice, pasta and rice. Non-food items such as toiletries, baby supplies, new socks and small presents have also been welcomed.

Our single biggest donation has been an amazing contribution of £2,000 worth of supplies handed over by former Goodyear workers. The cash was used to buy everything from tins of vegetables, noodle pots and pasta to bottles of squash, long-life milk and jars of coffee.

There was also an array of sweet treats including chocolate selection boxes for youngsters and vital toiletries including toothbrushes, shampoo and deodorant.

The money came from the Goodyear workers 5/344 Transport and General Workers' Union Benevolent Fund.

Unite branch chairman Cyril Barrett said: "It was our privilege to be able to support this wonderful, so badly needed, project in Wolverhampton and the Black Country."

We've also had two large anonymous donations which totalled almost 2,900 items from a community organisation in Staffordshire, who wanted to help those less fortunate. We've been really touched by how people have taken the appeal into their hearts and gone the extra mile.

Needy bag help from family

Neetu Mann with husband Kirpal Mann, Rajinda Batth and Janet Freeman

PILES of food was donated to charity with money collected from 5p bag charges.

Owners of Pinson Convenience Store in Willenhall, Neetu Mann, 52, and Kirpar Mann, 57 – who run the family store with their five children – have collected £70 since January from the charge on plastic bags and then added their own contributions with loose change they found to donate food to the less fortunate.

It is part of the Express and Star's Feed a Family campaign where food, toiletries and warm clothes are donated to food banks across the Black Country.

As part of their collection, they have tinned food, crisps, cereal, coffee, mince pies, pasta, biscuits and gravy.

Neetu said: "We said from day one we did not want to keep the change from the bag charges. It is good to help every little bit you can and we hope this will inspire others."

Last year they collected £80 and added £70 of their own money so they had £150 to spend on toys which they wrapped up and gave to children at Birmingham Children's Hospital for Christmas.

An amazing 12,000 items are collected

Diane Davies

THANK you, thank you, thank you, *writes deputy editor Diane Davies*. Thanks to every single person and group who made a donation and to those who collected items for our Feed A Family at Christmas campaign.

So many people will benefit from the amazing number of items collected. Thank you on the behalf of the homeless, families and households desperately relying on food banks and the women and children being helped by The Haven refuge this year. Having collected more than 9,000 food, toiletries and other items when we first launched the campaign last Christmas I had a secret number in my head this time of how many I hoped we would get this year.

I had my heart set on 10,000 but could not know for sure how our readers and local communities would respond to the campaign. I never dreamed we would actually collect more than 12,000 items – the total has been amazing and completely overwhelming.

How public, groups and stars rushed in with help

November 4: Lisa Riley launches Feed a Family appeal and urges readers to back the campaign. Waitrose in Wolverhampton and the Co-op in Codsall both come on board by hosting donation boxes.
November 6: Olympian Joe Clarke shows his support for the second year running and praises the cause.
November 8: Antiques Roadshow expert Will Farmer gives the campaign the thumbs-up
November 10: Staff and pupils at Wood End Primary School in Wednesfield start collecting as they pledged to support the appeal for the second year in a row.
November 11: The Express & Star receives a huge donation of more than 1,200 items of food from rice to biscuits from a kind-hearted Staffordshire organisation
November 17: Saddlers Shopping Centre in Walsall announces it will be collecting donations for the second year running
November 20: Slade's Dave Hill pledges support, says he enjoys helping to make a difference.
November 21: Youngsters, who are part of the HeadStart programme,at the Bob Jones Community Hub in Blakenhall pledge items for the collection.
November 22: Pop rock stars The Vamps throw their weight behind the campaign during a visit to switch on the Christmas lights at Merry Hill.
November 24: Cannock market trader Anne Franks offers to use her weekly pop-up stall at Cannock Indoor Market to collect items for Feed a Family.
November 27: Panto stars Ian Adams and Adam C Booth jumped forward to support the appeal when they popped into the Express & Star offices to meet staff.
November 27: Healthwatch groups come on board by saying they will be collecting donations in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Staffordshire
November 30: Corrie's Antony Cotton becomes the latest celebrity to back the campaign as he switches on Stourbridge's Christmas lights
December 2: The cast of Robin Hood and The Babes in the Wood give their backing to the appeal
December 4: Pupils at Oakham Primary School in Oldbury hold an assembly and organise a collection
December 6: Dudley North MP Ian Austin donates four boxes of food, toiletries and baby supplies.
December 6: Walsall Training Centre staff hand over dozens of donations
December 7: Gold medalist Hugh Porter champions Feed a Family This Christmas
December 8: Former Goodyear workers give the appeal a huge boost by donating £2,000 of food and toiletries for the good causes.
December 9: The Bishop of Dudley speaks out about the importance of food banks and hands over goodies.
December 12: We receive a second anonymous donation containing a staggering1,690 items of food.
December 14: Pupils from Westcroft School in Wolverhampton deliver their donations to our offices.
December 13: Performance Through People hand over festive items such as scarves and gloves, as well as basics.
December 14: Workers at Assa Abloy in Willenhall drop off two van-loads .
December 21: The final deliveries are made to the food banks in time for Christmas.

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Ex-resident jailed for theft from old hostel

A FORMER resident of a hostel who returned to steal from fellow tenants has been locked up for a year.

Liam Ponter kept keys to the property in Bushbury Lane, Bushbury when he left and used them to get in while the occupants were not at home.

The 21-year-old took a computer, a games console, clothing and a mobile phone valued at more than £900, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard. Ponter, of no fixed address, pleaded guilty to burglary.

Mr Neil Ahuja, prosecuting, said: "He used keys to the address that remained in his possession when he left. The two people living there were not at home when he entered."

The alarm was raised when an employee of the organisation that runs the hostel saw the front door open as he drove past the building on July 21. There was no sign of a break-in and forensic checks found the defendant's fingerprints on a bag in one of the rooms searched during the offence.

One of the victims felt so insecure after the burglary that he was forced to move elsewhere, the court was told.

Ponter had been responsible for a series of commercial burglaries which led to a short jail term during the run-up to the offence. He was homeless at the time after leaving an address in Wolverhampton following a falling out with his mother, said Mr Mohammed Naser, defending.

Prep school head waits to take reins

THE new headmistress of a preparatory school says she is looking forward to taking over the reins.

Sarah Morris has been appointed to lead Birchfield Preparatory School in Albrighton from September.

She is currently headmistress of Norfolk House Preparatory School in Edgbaston, Birmingham and prior to her taking up the post she served as deputy head at Birchfield for seven years.

The mother-of-two said: "I am absolutely thrilled to be appointed as headmistress of Birchfield. Birchfield is a very special place.

Chairman of the governors, Tracy Carver said: "We believe Sarah Morris has the experience, drive and passion to take Birchfield forward."

Blinders on list

BIRMINGHAM-BASED drama Peaky Blinders is up for best drama in the annual RadioTimes.com Reader Awards. It is up against 10 other series including Poldark, Victoria, Line of Duty and Doctor Foster.

Four years added to murderer's sentence

Aaron Barley

THE sentence of a homeless man who murdered two members of a family who tried to help him has been increased by four years at the Court of Appeal.

Aaron Barley, 24, was jailed for life with a minimum term of 30 years in October, for killing Tracey Wilkinson, 50, and her 13-year-old son Pierce at their home in Stourbridge.

He was also convicted of the attempted murder of Peter Wilkinson, 47.

At the Court of Appeal last Thursday, Barley had his 30-year minimum term increased to 34 years and 178 days.

Solicitor General Robert Buckland argued before Lord Justice Holroyde, Mrs Justice Whipple and Mr Justice Goose that the sentence was 'unduly lenient'.

The three judges agreed that the 30-year minimum term was insufficient in 'this most exceptional and grave case'.

Lord Justice Holroyde, Mrs Justice Whipple and Mr Justice Goose substituted it with a minimum term of 35 years, less time on remand – amounting to 34 years and 178 days before he can be considered for release on licence.

Mr Wilkinson and his daughter Lydia were in court in London while Barley watched from prison by video-link.

Barley had armed himself with a kitchen knife when he crept inside the family's home in March and stabbed them as they slept in their beds.

Mr Wilkinson, who was out walking the dog, was stabbed a number of times on his return and was fortunate to survive.

Lydia was away at university at the time of the attack.

Barley had been taken in by the family after Mrs Wilkinson spotted him sleeping rough outside a supermarket in spring 2016. Their help included supporting him to find a home and a job and inviting him to spend Christmas Day with them.

Help reach cash goal for this brave little girl Isla

A FUNDRAISING push has been launched by the family of a young girl who is fighting a rare form of cancer.

Isla Austin was diagnosed with high-risk neuroblastoma on her first birthday – and now her family are looking to raise £150,000 to fund experimental treatment in America.

Former Wolves goalkeeper Matt Murray, who is a family friend, has backed the appeal and urged others to do the same.

Isla has undergone numerous gruelling procedures lasting more than a year, including chemotherapy, radiotherapy, stem cell harvests, surgery and immunotherapy. But that has not knocked the two-year-old's appetite for life.

Isla who has a twin sister Lottie and older brother Finn, four, continues to smile and giggle despite her treatment. Her mother Anna, 37, who went to Dormston School in Sedgley, has had to quit her job to help look after Isla who has regular trips to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Anna has paid tribute to her battling daughter's resilience and thanked everyone who has donated to the fundraising push – which has already raised more than £20,000 in just four days.

Inspiration

The family needs to top £155,000 by the end of February.

Anna, who now lives in St Albans with her children and husband Rick, said: "Isla is absolutely amazing and she's our inspiration – she is so courageous, so brave.

"Children are so resilient. At every step of the way she's embraced this and done exactly what the consultants have asked for. She still smiles and giggles when she's in hospital even though she has gone through such a tough time.

"The donations are overwhelming and very humbling – it has taken us by surprise. We're a bit astonished really and truly grateful to everybody and want to thank everyone for their support."

While Isla is currently in remission from cancer, youngsters with neuroblastoma – the same disease which young Sunderland fan Bradley Lowery suffered from – have a 50 per cent chance of a relapse. And relapsed neuroblastoma has a less than 1 in 10 chance of survival. Murray, 36, lived with Anna's aunt and uncle Jan and Peter Morris from 1997 to 2003 in Penn, after leaving school. He said: "They're all amazing, a really close knit family.

"Anna is in the same school year as me and we've all been friends ever since.

"Being a parent myself what Anna and Rick are going through must be so hard.

"Isla is such a happy little girl, always smiling, she's amazing and she's a fighter. The whole family are great people. Her mum spends a lot of time in hospital with her and when I speak to her you can always hear little Isla in the background.

"If we can raise this money and get the family over there then she really deserves it. "

To donate visit https://www.justgiving.com/campaigns/charity/solvingkidscancer/islaaustin?social_utm_term=u4kq7rjiy

Isla was diagnosed with high-risk neuroblastoma

Isla with twin sister Lottie and brother Finn

Support from ex-Wolves keeper Matt Murray

NEWS IN BRIEF

Play area boost at primary school

A PRIMARY school has had a new canopy holding four play areas built in its grounds.

The structure was installed at Holyhead Primary Academy in Wednesbury, with materials supplied by Jewsons, on Portway Road in the town.

School principle Matthew Wynne said: "A focus of the school this year was to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor environment.

"Before we knew it builders were meeting with us and drawing up plans and materials were being delivered – free of charge. It was like Christmas had come early."

Gifts transported by company staff

NATIONAL Express West Midlands' Bordesley head office selected St Basils as its chosen charity this year.

Over the last 12 months head office staff have worked together to raise £1,200, beating their £1,000 target.

Members of the team handed over some early Christmas presents.

Tracy Kelly and Chris Dickinson from the NXWM Bordesley office visited the hub to hand over three starter packs containing essential items which support the charity in helping young people move on and live independently.

Chance to step on the careers ladder

A CAREERS, apprenticeships, education, training and jobs fair is being held in West Bromwich next month.

It is taking place at Sandwell College's Central Sixth in New Street, West Bromwich, on January 20 from 10am to 2pm.

The ninth annual free New Year – New Start event is being held by Connexions Sandwell.

It is aimed at young people aged 14-to-19-years-old.

Contact Connexions Sandwell for further information on 0121 569 2955.

Fair deal for music collectors in new year

A MUSIC fair is coming to Wolverhampton in the new year. VIP-24 hosts a buy and sell fair for music collectors at the Civic centre on January 6.

An array of CDs, vinyl, DVDs, books, videos, cassette tapes, posters, clothing, badges, photographs, magazines, artwork, and various other memorabilia will be on sale from 10am with entry priced at £2 on the door. Call 07802 258080 or email rob@vip-24.com

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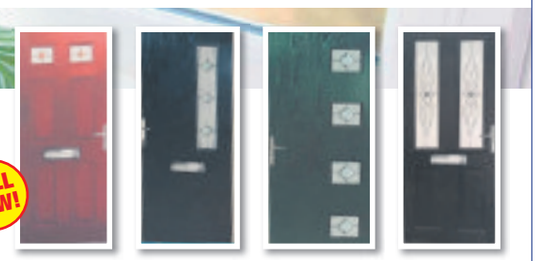

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Crime is crime – in any language

HERE'S a bit of news to warm the cockles of the heart over Christmas. Do you remember the police force in Nottinghamshire that decided wolf-whistling was a "hate crime"? Well the great news is that the one-year trial has been so successful it is being made a permanent fixture.

Taking photographs without consent and verbal abuse are also classed as hate crimes, so it is just as well these new rules weren't being trialled in West Bromwich a few weeks ago. Some of the language used by Albion fans towards Tony Pulis would have made a docker blush.

It's a strange situation when police chiefs decide what is and isn't a crime. In the old days governments made the laws, and the police simply enforced them, so I'm obviously behind the curve on this one. Still, where Nottingham leads, the rest follow, and I dare say we'll see a national crackdown on wolf-whistling in the next year or too.

The logical conclusion is that Nottinghamshire Police are so hot they have totally eradicated all major crime, and are now able to focus on the trivial stuff. But it seems this might not quite be the case.

Just a few weeks ago, the county's police and crime commissioner Paddy Tipping revealed that officers may not investigate shoplifting offences in future to cut costs. Great news for light-fingered low-life, but not so good for shopkeepers who would prefer customers to actually pay for their festive shopping.

Defending the move, Mr Tipping said officers didn't bother with attempted car break-ins, either, unless the victim was particularly vulnerable.

"Is shoplifting as important as investigating a serious sexual assault?" he asked. "It is not." Maybe. But it is a sight more important than wolf-whistling, wouldn't you say?

❒❒❒

FOR all the bad press, I'm quite a fan of budget airline RyanAir. Yes its planes are cramped and the colour schemes migraine inducing, and the endless announcements about cut-price cigarettes and pre-packaged foods infuriating.

But it has brought foreign travel within reach of millions who would otherwise not get the chance, and for punctual short-haul flights at bargain prices, it does exactly what it says on the tin.

But how can it justify charging Lichfield electrician Darren Bliss £110 to correct an error on the tickets caused by predictive phone text? The flight itself cost just £65, and the admin costs would be minimal. The company says it deters people from selling tickets on the black market. It would put me off booking them at all.

Corbyn's PM assertion relies on a snap election

Prince Philip – good company, sharp as a knife and with a keen sense of humour

Jeremy Corbyn – air of desperation in comment on being PM by next year

Lord Malloch-Brown – why him leading a campaign against Brexit is good news

No Jeremy, years are against you

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

THIS year's Humbuggery Award for mean, grasping and cheapskate yuletide telly goes to the Beeb for the Detectorists Christmas Special which was no such thing, merely a repeat of an earlier episode. Ebenezer would be proud of you, Auntie.

THERE is an air of desperation in Jeremy Corbyn's recent assertion that he will "probably" be prime minister by this time next year. The next General Election may not be until May 2022. If he won then, Mr Corbyn would enter Number Ten just before his 73rd birthday and would be 78 at the end of his first term. His only realistic hope is a snap election in the next couple of years. Even if the polls were for him, the years are against him. Probably.

I'M enjoying The Crown (Netflix), even though we don't know how much of it is factual. Was the party-animal Duke of Edinburgh really given the title "Prince Philip" as part of a deal to make him behave? For what it's worth, I once interviewed the Duke in his office at Buckingham Palace. We were alone for about an hour and he was good company, sharp as a knife and had a keen sense of humour. But my abiding impression was that here was a man who very rarely heard the word "no".

HIS Serene Magnificence the Right Honourable The Lord Malloch-Brown KCMG PC is to lead a campaign against Brexit. This is excellent news for Brexit. Remember those howls of rage when Sir Martin Moore-Bick was appointed head of the Grenfell Tower inquiry? The people demanded to know how a white middle-class retired judge could possible relate to them. Expect more of the same. Malloch-Brown is a double-barrelled product of Marlborough and Cambridge who was never elected to anything by anyone. He was appointed to the House of Lords to serve in Gordon Brown's cabinet. That government ended 10 years ago yet milord still wields power. So let him present his plans to overturn the result of our EU Referendum. Let him try to convince us that someone like him, a gilded veteran of the diplomatic corps and the World Bank, a member of the globetrotting elite and consultant to big businesses, knows anything about the life of a fisherman from Grimsby or a foundry worker in Wolverhampton. Every time a Malloch-Brown, or a Tony Blair, or a Gina Miller tries to tell us what is good for us, it's worth another million votes for Brexit. The toffs versus the people. Bring it on.

AFTER last week's item on the benefits of winter tyres, a reader says his new 4x4 seems "invincible." Oh, beware. In my misspent youth with the Territorial Army, we spent a lot of time digging "invincible" 4x4s out of mud, slush and snow. My troop's personal best was three Land Rovers in a queue, stuck up to their wheel arches. We had to bang on the door of the Royal Armoured Corps and borrow a tracked vehicle to pull them out. Believe me, when the snowman brings the snow what you really need is a Scorpion tank.

DELIGHTED to see gin has overtaken rum, whisky and vodka to become the nation's favourite spirit. In his glorious Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams says about 85 per cent of all known worlds in the Galaxy have invented a drink called jynnan tonyx, or gee-N'N-T'N-ix, or jinond-o-nicks, "or any one of a thousand variations on this phonetic theme." G&T is a pan-galactic success, so subtle, so complex, so effervescently effective in calming the universe and making all life-forms nicer. The trouble is that the universe, being infinite, just doesn't know when to stop.

SNOWFLAKE kids have been blamed for objecting to a weather message issued by University College London to let students know the place would remain open despite the snow. It went: "Dreaming of a white campus? Our campuses will be open and operating fully today." For anyone of a certain age "white campus" is a clever play on the words "White Christmas" from the much-loved Bing Crosby song of 1942. But some students denounced the message as racist and fascist, and the uni scrapped it, apologising with a grovelling: "We chose our words very poorly." Damn right. Parade the guilty men and women in public and send them for re-education. And for the benefit of any students reading this who are a bit shaky on modern history, Bing Crosby was Adolf Hitler's cultural attache and White Christmas was, of course, the marching song of the Waffen SS. Make sure you include this in your next essay.

SCROOGE was a grasping, covetous sinner but he hounded his debtors regardless of race or creed. He may have been a miserable old git but he was an equal-opportunities miserable old git. Scrooge has served us well every Christmas since 1843 and I see no good reason to muck around with his character now. Incidentally, kids, I'm pretty sure Ebenezer Scrooge would have voted for Brexit. Hiss the villain.

TALKING POINT

Turkey time gone – now it's back to just JAM

SO Happy New Year everyone, yay! We'll soon have got through the festivities, the euphoria will then be a distant memory, and the winter gloom will be back upon us.

Millions of us will be facing JAM financial repercussions (just about managing), having begged, borrowed and stolen to get the money together for the season of goodwill.

Why do we celebrate the turning of time quite so vehemently when we enter the next instalment of 365 days nearer towards our ultimate demise?

The only common link is that we are all getting older. It is a time of reflection and of course a time to look forward, what can we do this year to improve on things last year?

Like a confessional, the mistakes and heartaches of 2017 can be wiped clean and we promise ourselves a better 2018. But is it really that easy?

Sure move on and try to make things better, but it doesn't all disappear with the wave of a magic wand with resolutions written on it.

One year I truly went for it. I sat down with an A3-lined paper pad and listed things I wanted to change in my life.

Get a girl, sort out my teeth, keep fit, don't drink as much, don't swear as much... they were all there on my resolutions list and I think out of what might have been about 15 or so, I managed two.

Yes, I'm now happily married and my teeth, while not sparklingly white, are definitely better, but the battle of the bulge goes on, and the air turns as blue, just as frequently.

So being realistic is perhaps the way to go with resolutions, after all, unless you are absolutely intent on changing your whole life, no-one on this earth is going to do everything they want.

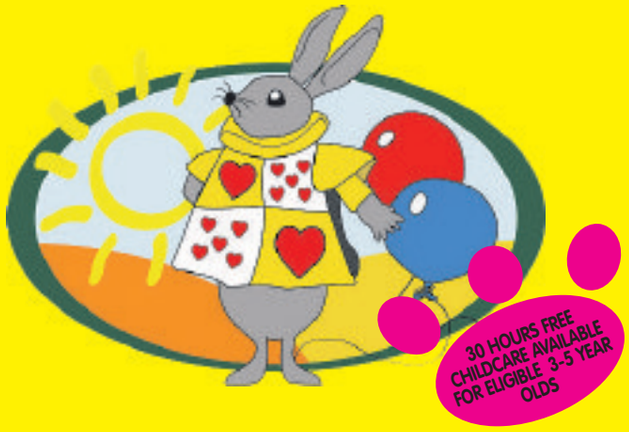
In the words of John Lennon: "Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans..."

Start small – help people, try smiling more often, drink more water etc, you might not change the world, you might not change yourself, but you may feel better about things, which is a starting point.

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. But personally, that doesn't have to happen on January 1, it's whenever you want.

The most successful resolution I had was giving up smoking, January 1, 1991 and I've stuck to it ever since, even when I've been trapped in a Transit van with five other people smoking like chimneys on a trip around Europe...but that's another story!

GRAEME ANDREW



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Get tuned in for event to support charity

IT'S the policy of the radio show I host for Black Country Radio to each year take a charity to support. In the past we have supported Autism West Midlands and Action Heart Dudley among many others.

The year 2018 will see us linking up with Parkinson's Society and I will be working with performers Pete Brookes and John Langford to set up a series of events across the region to help support the charity.

The main event will also be connected to this year's Black Country Festival when we will be taking the Omma n Chain to the Lighthouse in Wolverhampton for a day-long festival of music, storytelling and spoken word, which will run from 11am until 10pm.

It will be split into two phases – 11am until 5pm will see two stages outside and performance spaces inside, while 5pm to 10pm, four or five invited bands will play in the courtyard.

We hope to create a market atmosphere so it could be you promoting your group or product, maybe something you wish to sell (cakes, pies, etc or bric-a-brac). There will be a small charge for space, which will go directly to the charity. John, Pete and Bren Hawthorne will organise all the music and I hope to have someone who would like to run a kiddies creative section and a comedic magician.

If you are interested in having a stall or any more information please email b.dakin@aston.ac.uk We are proud to be supporting this charity so look out for announcements of all events running up to July 28. Thanks to everyone for your support through 2017.

DR B DAKIN
Visiting Research Fellow
Aston University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

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The short memories of nations

THE letter by M Cooper was spot on. While we were paying the US back all the lend-lease money in the Second World War, they were rebuilding their lot, and we still had rationing. Don't forget we had bomb damage to be put right.

I'm sorry I can't remember Russia paying us anything for all those arctic convoys and men who lost their lives taking it to them? Like tanks and planes and guns, etc.

Don't Germany remember the air lift and all the supplies we took to them when they were starving and got no coal for heating? Did we ask for money first? If we buy more off them than they do off us surely they are the ones to lose out, and them giving us money to stay, not the other way round.

I think the Yanks could have let us off a bit with that lend-lease. After all we were all fighting for freedom and on the same side.

MR F H JENNINGS
Birmingham

Glad to see top steel firm is going strong

I WAS very interested to read the article on Malthouse Engineering in the paper. I worked in the steel profiling industry between 1965 to 1970 I was employed by Miles Druce Profiles formerly Floodgate Profiles.

We subcontracted high carbon jobs to Malthouse along with some surface grinding. They were very professional. Steel profiling then was a very dynamic, innovative industry with firms working hard to outdo each other to cut the biggest, thinnest, thickest, most complicated shapes. I am delighted Malthouse is still going strong. They were very happy days for me, it was the ideal training ground.

ROGER WATTS
Walsall

An army of bureaucrats in Brussels

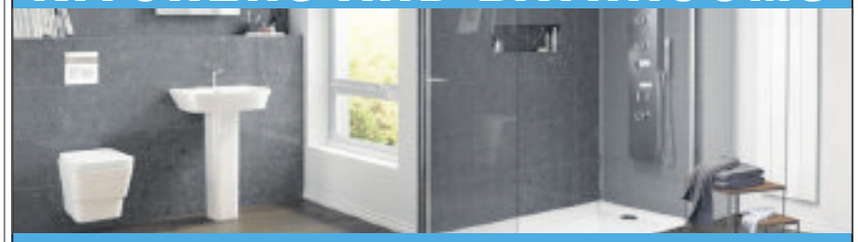
SINCE joining the Common Market we have surreptitiously become a member of the EU. Now we have a vast army of bureaucrats churning out thousands of laws which can overturn our own laws and democratic wishes. On top of this we have had a string of disasters such as the ERM, excessive immigration, open borders, human rights and then some farcical aspects of health and safety.

Regarding the false accusation that the Brexiters are anti-European I am certain that almost everybody wants full cooperation but without the Brussels gobbledegook and its perks, expenses and gold plated pensions.

It would be interesting to see a list of the fat cat beneficiaries especially now that Nigel Farage is one of them. With all the damage already done, Brexit or no Brexit, I fear that we could be edging towards anarchy.

MR J SAUNDERS
West Bromwich

KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS



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Festive cheer for families delivered

A hamper made up of food and essentials by King's Community Church members, is delivered by Sarah Jordan

MORE than 20 families living below the poverty line received Christmas hampers made by an Oldbury Church.

Members of King's Community Church, which runs the Oldbury CAP Debt Centre in partnership with national charity Christians Against Poverty (CAP), filled hampers with food and other essentials to deliver across the community.

Reverend Matthew Nott, of King's Community Church, said: "Christmas on a very tight budget can be a very difficult time – it's a huge privilege to be able to lighten the load just a little."

CAP's head office negotiates with each person's creditors and local volunteers offer support to each person until they become debt free.

Sarah Jordan, Oldbury CAP Debt Centre Manager said: "It's great to be able to say to people that however impossible their financial situation seems, we will be able to help."

Key advice on being ready for emergency

A BOOKLET offering vital information on how to reduce potential risks and be prepared for emergencies has been launched.

The West Midlands Prepared online register provides information and advice in the event of an emergency as well as accidents and extreme weather and has been welcomed by Sandwell councillors.

It covers possible emergencies, from heatwaves, flooding and industrial action to infectious diseases, cyber threats and terrorism.

The easy-to-read information also includes industrial accidents, power failures, flooding, transport disruption, fuel shortage and cold weather problems.

Practical

"Prepared Panda" is the mascot of West Midlands Local Resilience Forum and can be found across multiple social media platforms. There's practical advice about how to prepare for any emergency included within the booklet which can be downloaded at www.westmidlandsprepared.uk

Councillor Syeda Khatun, deputy leader of Sandwell

By Simon Stone

Council, said: "This is a very useful booklet which gives easy-to-find advice on how people can work out a way of dealing with some of the traumas that could happen in the future.

"I welcome this work and would urge people to spend a little time on reading the information and to keep the weblink handy."

The booklet has been designed to give people chance to "know the risks, be informed and get prepared" for any future emergencies.

It advises people make up a grab bag in case of emergencies, made up of a battery radio, a wind-up torch, first aid kit, spare clothes, blankets, toiletries, bottled water and tinned food.

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Appeal judges cut road ban of dangerous driving doctor

A PROMISING young doctor locked up for 'truly terrible' driving that left a pedestrian maimed has had his road ban slashed on appeal.

Daryl Perera, aged 29, was shattered after working two 12-hour shifts at Sandwell General Hospital at the time of the accident.

The medic, from High Wycombe, shot through a give-way sign in Birmingham centre in July last year and sped 'blindly across a junction'.

He collided with another car and a passing pedestrian was crushed against a wall.

A security guard coming home from his night shift suffered 'massive and life-changing injuries', Lord Justice Irwin told London's Appeal Court.

The hard-working family man sustained head wounds which caused a stroke, as well as spinal and leg fractures and damage to his spleen.

He was hospitalised for five months after the accident and, at the time of sentence, 'could not dress himself or his children', said the judge.

Ordeal

But despite his ordeal, he had been 'most impressive in his calmness and lack of bitterness'.

Perera, of Cressex Road, was jailed for two years at Birmingham Crown Court in June after admitting causing serious injury by dangerous driving. He was a young doctor with 'excellent prospects' who had shown 'deep and genuine remorse', the court heard.

Refusing to cut his jail term, the judge said he was guilty of a 'truly dreadful and terrible piece of driving' and his sentence was 'severe, but not excessive'. However, Lord Justice Irwin, sitting with Mr Justice Picken and Judge Mark Lucraft, cut Perera's driving ban from five years to two.

Hotel guest in daredevil selfie stunt

A DAREDEVIL photographer stunned office workers after they brazenly took selfies on the roof of a 24-storey luxury hotel in the heart of Birmingham.

The person, dressed in black, was spotted on the roof of the Hyatt Regency hotel by Centenary Square at around 3.30pm on December 18. They could be seen standing on the edge before lying down, with one leg hanging over the edge of the building, and taking photographs.

A witness who was working in a nearby building was able to take pictures of the thrill-seeker.

Mario Flanagan, General Manager of the hotel, said: "A member of the public gained unauthorised access to roof whilst maintenance work was taking place.

"The situation was resolved."

Unsung heroes honoured at ceremony

Deputy Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Susan Eaves with winners and runners-up at the West Bromwich Community Awards

WEST Bromwich community heroes were celebrated at a special awards evening. Around 170 people attended the West Bromwich Community Awards at the town hall.

The community-led event by Sandwell Community Hubs was supported by Sandwell Council and private sponsors including Tesco New Square, West Bromwich Business Improvement District and Sandwell College. Pam Jackson won the Community Special award with Margaret Whitehouse runner-up. However, Pam missed out on the Outstanding Volunteer to Jeanne Mansingh.

The Outstanding Young Person went to Bethany Taylor ahead of Bradley Foster and Liam Biddle; West Bromwich Food Bank pipped Yew Tree & Tame Bridge Community Centre to the Outstanding Community Project: For the Outstanding Partnership, Busy Bees took the title ahead of Community Advice Service, while Linda Callaghan picked up the Outstanding Neighbour, beating John Coley.

Guest speakers were deputy council leader Councillor Syeda Khatun, chairman of Sandwell Community Hubs Tonia Flannagan and council chief executive Jan Britton. Entertainment came from Dreemz Group, Blind Faith, Cre-8, Fathia Dance Group and People's Orchestra and £592 was raised for the mayor's charities.

£27m light rail centre plan lodged

A £27 million rail construction centre which will create more than 200 jobs in Dudley has been hailed as the 'feather in the cap' – as a planning application was formally submitted.

The creation of the light rail innovation centre in the heart of the town has moved a step closer with detailed plans having been lodged with the borough council.

The pioneering facility, which will create 225 jobs and 331 apprenticeships, will feature cutting-edge technology shaping the future of transport.

The innovation centre will see part of Castle Hill transformed. The 550-strong workforce will be responsible for designing, building and testing lightweight rail vehicles.

Research and development laboratories will be built alongside facilities for general manufacturing, conferences, teaching and training and further infrastructure. The hub will also feature a test track, which will be created on a disused rail line.

It is described in planning documents as 'a world-class hub to support the development of very light rail manufacturing in the UK'.

Dudley Council's regeneration boss Councillor Ian Kettle said: "It is going to have a big influence on the bottom end of the town."

Request goes out to find relatives

RELATIVES of a woman who died recently are being asked to get in touch with City of Wolverhampton Council so her funeral can be arranged.

Edith Guest, 92, previously lived in the Low Hill area of Wolverhampton and for many years lived in Goldthorn Hill. Call 01902 555394 or email emma.dart2@wolverhampton.gov.uk

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Wednesday	17th 24th 31st Jan 10:30-12:30	Craft Group
Thursday	18th 25th Jan 13:00-15:00	Digital Cafe
Thursday	18th 25th Jan 13:00-15:00	Art Group
Thursday	18th 25th Jan 10:30-12:30	Benefit Advice
Thursday	18th Jan 13:00-15:00	Healthwatch Advice
Monday	12th Feb 13:00-15:00	Free Film Event

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Armed police in gun crime probe

ARMED police descended on a high street as homes were raided as part of an investigation into gun crime.

A section of Quarry Bank High Street was sealed off on December 19, around 5pm.

Police said the operation was 'part of an ongoing efforts to tackle gun crime in the region' but that no arrests were made and no firearms were found.

Detective Chief Inspector Annie Miller, from West Midlands Police CID, said: "If anyone has information on the criminal possession of firearms in our region, I'd urge them to pass that information on to us either by phoning 101, or by calling Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555111."

Supermarket ensures Christmas treat in store for pupils

One of the pupils gets to feed a donkey

CHILDREN at a special school were given a Christmas extravaganza by staff from a supermarket.

Pupils at The Meadows in Oldbury were treated to a festive bouncy castle, bucking reindeer, icy fruit drinks, donkeys, hot chocolates and a snow machine.

The items were put on by the Co-op, where staff have been raising money in the past few weeks to give the children an extra special day at school.

The event took place on December 15. Becki Bolton, learning facilitator from the Co-op, said: "My nephew attends the school so we wanted to give the children at The Meadows an extra special day filled with lots of Christmas fun.

"The staff had such a lovely time and it was very touching to see how much the children enjoyed the day."

Pupils with Santa during the Christmas extravaganza

Run open for entries

REGISTRATIONS for next summer's Black Country Run open on New Year's Day.

The Rotary Club on Halesowen and Rowley Regis is organising the event on July 1 with Cobra Running Club.

There will be a 10km road race around Halesowen and a family fun run and walk.

A corporate challenge is also planned as part of the event.

To register visit www.blackcountryrun.com

Assessment house aids requests for equipment

Councillor Ann Shackleton, cabinet member for social care and social care team manager Charlotte Leadbeater-Chase

A SPECIAL 'assessment house' has been created at the Independent Living Centre in Smethwick. It will help to speed up requests for equipment and adaptations to help people live independently in their own homes.

A specially trained team made up of prevention assessors, occupational therapists and sensory rehabilitation officers can now carry out face-to-face assessments and demonstrations of equipment in a number of every day settings such as bedrooms, bathrooms and living rooms and a kitchen.

The rooms have been fitted out with a range of equipment such as walking frames, high seated chairs, perching stools and bathing aids as well as a vertical lift and a stair lift which people can see in use.

The therapy and sensory teams can carry out a range of assessments for people including using bedroom and bathroom equipment, walking aids and coping with stairs.

For people with visual and hearing difficulties, items such as liquid level indicators to help with the filling of cups and flashing doorbells to help assist a person in knowing someone is at the door are available. Assistive Technology can also be provided with items such as smoke alarms.

Councillor Ann Shackleton, cabinet member for social care, who opened the facility with David Stevens, Sandwell Council's executive director of adult social care, health and wellbeing, said: "I'm delighted to be able to formally open this excellent new 'assessment house' which has already carried out 75 assessments since it opened in November.

"The most popular areas which people need help with are bathing and mobilising around their home, and the assessment team works hard to identify what equipment will most benefit residents."

Once the assessment has been completed, any equipment identified is then delivered to their home for free on a loan basis. A more detailed assessment can be carried out at home if necessary.

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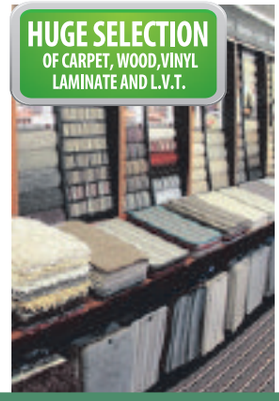

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Police identify victim found dead in road

A MAN killed in a suspected hit-and-run has been named by police.

Krzyzstof Klasowski died after being hit by a vehicle on Amblecote High Street, Stourbridge.

The 37-year-old, from West Bromwich, was found in the road with multiple injuries at around 5.30am on December 17.

Krzyzstof Klasowski

Police are continuing to appeal for any information surrounding Mr Klasowski's death.

A 20-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving after handing himself in to a police station. He has since been released as the investigation continues.

Sergeant Alan Wood, from West Midlands Police, said: "A number of people have spoken to me and my team but I am appealing to anyone who has not yet come forward and who was in the area at around 3.30pm to contact me."

Anyone with information is asked to email the Collision Investigation Unit at fl_collision_invest@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk.

Multi-occupancy home plan lodged

PLANS to convert two properties in Smethwick into shared housing have been submitted.

The houses of multiple occupation, consisting of eight and nine bedrooms, would be created on Bearwood Road and William Road, under plans lodged with Sandwell Council.

Spurned husband fatally stabbed wife, inquest told

A SCORNED husband fatally stabbed his wife while she was sleeping after struggling to come to terms with their divorce, an inquest heard.

James Barnes plunged a kitchen knife into Amy Barnes' neck as she lay in bed following her hospital night shift.

The 30-year-old then fled the 'murder' scene and set fire to himself at his parents' Streetly home, Birmingham Coroners' Court was told.

At an inquest into Mrs Barnes' death, Senior Coroner Mrs Louise Hunt recorded a verdict of unlawful killing. She said: "She had recently told her husband she wanted a divorce and several hours after her death, he set fire to himself."

Belongings

Mrs Barnes asked her husband-of-three-years for a divorce after the pair, who had been seeing a guidance counsellor, returned from a weekend away. Her husband was in the process of moving his belongings out of their Birmingham house when he killed her, the inquest heard.

Mother Valerie Shimell paid tribute to her daughter, describing the 32-year-old as her 'precious gift', in a statement read to the court. She said: "This extremely tragic loss of my wonderful baby has left a huge hole in not only my life, but all the people who knew her – the beautiful girl who smiles with her eyes.

James and Amy Barnes seen on their wedding day

Emergency personnel at couple's home in Cofton Park Close, Rednal

"Everyone was so proud to have loved her. We are all devastated by her loss. A part of me died with her on that awful day, a part that will never be repaired." The bereaved mother went on to tell the court her daughter was convinced Mr Barnes would never hurt her.

Mrs Shimell added: "She was always concerned about him because she thought he would do something to himself if she left him."

Nursery nurse Mrs Barnes left Birmingham Women's Hospital, where she cared for sick babies, and made her way home at 7.45am on September 25. Her body was discovered by her mother and sister at the couple's home in Cofton Park Close, Rednal, later that day.

DI Caroline Corfield, of West Midlands Police's homicide team, said Mr Barnes had let himself into the house with a key before using a knife from inside the home to stab his wife.

He locked the door on the way out and then travelled 15 miles to his parents' home in Linforth Drive, where he killed himself. A small blue notebook uncovered near Mrs Barnes' body detailed the pair's marital woes and was signed by her husband, the court heard.

Giving evidence at the inquest, the officer confirmed police were called to the Streetly home just before midnight before officers found Mrs Barnes' body face down in the bed at least 40 minutes later. She added: "It did appear that she had been attacked in bed in her sleep. James Barnes was responsible for the murder of Amy Barnes.There were no signs whatsoever that James would ever be violent to Amy."

In a statement read to the court, younger sisters Lucy and Emily said: "[Amy] was truly beautiful, inside and out. We know it's a cliche, but we have lost a huge part of ourselves."

Pathologist Dr Nicholas Hunt told the inquest part of the knife blade remained lodged in Mrs Barnes' neck after her husband wounded her. She suffered 'massive blood loss' and had no defensive injuries, he added.

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Aladdin

Already a smash-hit on Broadway, this fantastic show follows the story of a rakish street urchin-turned-handsome-prince in Disney's lavish musical production of Aladdin, now at the Prince Edward Theatre.

Directed and choreographed by Casey Nicholaw (The Book of Mormon), Aladdin the Musical gives you the catchy songs from the classic Disney film plus new material by Alan Menken (Beauty and the Beast) with lyrics by Howard Ashman (Beauty and the Beast) and Sir Tim Rice (The Lion King).

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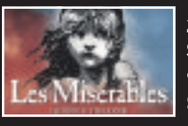

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Arrest after car ends up on tram tracks

A WOMAN was arrested after a Land Rover ended up on tram tracks.

The car was discovered in the early hours of Sunday, December 17, blocking the tracks between Winson Green and Handsworth Booth Street stations.

There was disruption to the Midland Metro service until 6pm and the vehicle was removed using two rail cranes the following night.

A British Transport Police spokeswoman confirmed a 38-year-old woman had been arrested on suspicion of obstruction and dangerous driving. She was released under investigation while enquiries continue.

Ali Bell, spokesman for National Express, which operates the service, said: "We removed the vehicle on Monday night after the last tram, using two rail cranes.

"Midland Metro would like to apologise for the disruption to journeys."

Safeguarding network launch

COMMUNITY and faith groups in Sandwell have signed up to a safeguarding network to help protect vulnerable children and adults.

The Community and Faith-based Establishment Safeguarding Network aims to 'build stronger links, share ideas and resources, and provide training to ensure vulnerable children and adults are safe.

A launch event earlier this month at West Bromwich Community Centre in Gayton Road included workshops on leadership, partnership working and what the network could achieve.

Sandwell Council deputy leader Syeda Khatun said: "This was a very positive event."

To get involved with the network email lscb_sandwell@sandwell.gov.uk

Concert pickpocket hid stolen mobile phones in swimsuit

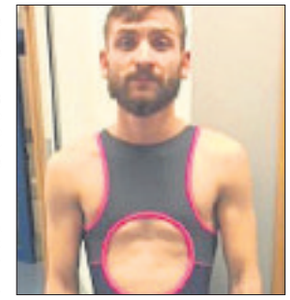
A PICKPOCKET slipped into a swimsuit beneath his clothes to conceal more than 50 mobile phones snatched from revellers at a gig.

But thief Alin Marin was left out of his depth after being snared in a covert operation by police and has now begun a three-year jail term.

Marin, of no fixed address, turned himself into a 'human deposit box' for phones swiped from gig-goers in the mosh pit during a Royal Blood concert at Arena Birmingham on November 18.

West Midlands Police officers were also mingling with the crowd prompted by intelligence that thieves had targeted fans of the band at performances earlier this year.

Romanian national Marin hid 53 phones inside a compression suit he was wearing beneath his clothing. He was arrested in Broad Street shortly after leaving the gig – and the phones recovered from a nearby car park.



Thief Alin Marin in swimsuit

Message

The 22-year-old was charged with theft and at Birmingham Crown Court he was jailed for three years after admitting the offence.

Birmingham city centre police sergeant Julia Slater said the jail term should send out a clear message to travelling thieves: "Come to the West Midlands and you risk being jailed."

She added: "This was organised pickpocketing. Marin went equipped to steal phones and took advantage of revellers enjoying themselves in the standing area.

"Many of the phones were taken from front jeans pockets, which people believe is a safer place to carry valuables, but due to the jostling in the mosh pit they simply didn't realise they'd been targeted.

"He slipped phones inside the swimsuit and effectively turned himself into a deposit box for the phones, allowing him to carry tens of phones concealed around his body."

Sgt Slater urged other concertgoers to be vigilant when attending busy venues. "It's an unfortunate reality that large crowds at concerts can make rich pickings for career criminals," she said.

"We're on to these offenders but you can also reduce your chances of falling victim to such crimes by remaining extra vigilant; look out for suspicious behaviour and only take the valuables with you that you really need."

The force is with panto star Bev

SOUL star Beverley Knight soaked up the Yuletide atmosphere at Christmas markets in Birmingham – before starring in the opening performance of her first ever pantomime.

Officers from the West Midlands Police Force Support Unit came across the Wolverhampton-raised star at the Frankfurt Christmas Market in the Second City. The support unit posted an image with Beverley, with the comment: "Officers working the German markets bumped into Beverley Knight. Who could refuse this picture?"

Beverley is starring in Cinderella, this year's Birmingham Hippodrome spectacular. It is her first pantomime role.

She is starring alongside Strictly Come Dancing 2016 finalist Danny Mac, Brum panto favourite Matt Slack, pop singer and Dancing On Ice star Suzanne Shaw and veteran comedy duo The Grumbleweeds.

The show runs until January 28.

Beverley attended Woodfield Infant and Junior Schools and Highfields School, in Wolverhampton, while being brought up in a strict Pentecostal household. She has released eight studio albums and starred on the West End including a six-month run in The Bodyguard.

Beverley joins the unit at the Frankfurt Christmas Market in Birmingham

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The Ticket

WE'RE HAVING A WORD WITH BENJAMIN

INSIDE

THEATRE + MUSIC + TV GUIDE

COMMERCIAL FEATURE

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Manager Mandy always ensure a warm welcome to customers old and new at the Waggon & Horses in Oldbury.

Waggon & Horses also showcase all the major sporting events from Football to Boxing all featured on Sky Sports, BT Sports and Box Nation. For those who like 'doing' rather than 'watching' there is the availability of the Pool Table. The pub itself boasts a wide range of ciders, lagers, wines and spirits including 'Real Ales' which they rotate weekly. Regulars very often enjoy ales such as Bathams, AJ Ales, Oakham, JHB, Stairway To Heaven and MA Pardoes Entire, Plus many more!.

The pub also run a loyalty scheme which means customers get 10p back on their card for every pound spend.

The pub also has regular live entertainment over weekends and also offers a FREE Juke box on a Friday night.

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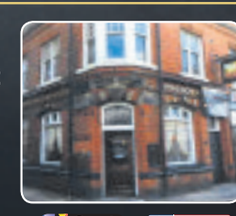

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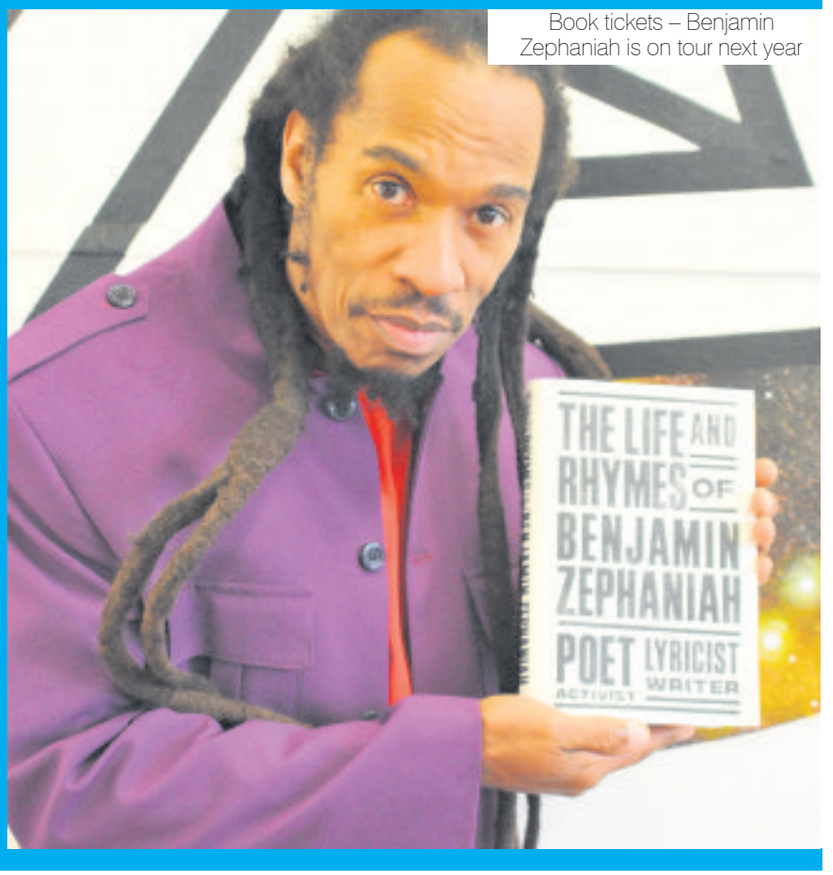
Word to the wise: It's poet Benjamin

When Benjamin Zephaniah received the dates for his first tour in eight years two stood out. The performance poet who stars in Peaky Blinders and became friends with Nelson Mandela was thrilled to note gigs in Birmingham and Shrewsbury.



Book tickets – Benjamin Zephaniah is on tour next year

Birmingham was, of course, the city in which he was born and the place that honed both his political views and his determination to make something of his life. And Shrewsbury was a crossroads town – a place near to the north Shropshire borstal that provided him with a crossroads moment. It led to him reshaping his life and becoming one of Britain's best loved and most respected poets.

Benjamin or, to give him his rather grand title, Professor Benjamin Zephaniah, will hit the road in spring, playing Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn on June 14 and Birmingham's Town Hall on June 15. The shows will follow the release of his new autobiography, The Life And Rhymes of Benjamin Zephaniah, which will be published by Simon & Schuster in May.

He is looking forward to being back on the road and to see friendly faces from the West Midlands.

"Those places will always be important to me," he says. "I live in a different part of the country now but I'm regularly back in Birmingham. Peaky Blinders is centred on the city and my mother still lives there too.

"And Shrewsbury brings back very fond memories. I've played Theatre Severn before and always been given a very warm welcome. I'm looking forward to coming back."

INDIVIDUAL

Benjamin's new book and tour chart our social history, as well as his own individual story.

He loved growing up in Handsworth, which he called the Jamaican capital of Europe. He learnt to rhyme at his mother's church but although his work become popular within the African-Caribbean and Asian community he thought the town was too small.

He was not satisfied preaching about the sufferings of black people to black people, so he sought a wider mainstream audience. At the age of 22 he headed to London where his first book Pen Rhythm was published by Page One Books. The book sold well, going into three editions but it was in performance that the Dub (Reggae) Poet would cause a revolution, a revolution that injected new life into the British poetry scene and attracted the interest of many mainstream publishers, many of whom had sent refusal letters to him only 12 months earlier. In the early 1980s when punks and Rastas were on the streets protesting about unemployment, homelessness and the National Front, Benjamin's poetry could be heard at demonstrations, outside police stations and on the dance floor.

His mission was to take poetry everywhere, and to popularise it by reaching people who didn't read books. His poetry was political, musical, radical and relevant. By the early 1990s, Benjamin had performed on every continent in the world, a feat he achieved in only one year, and he hasn't stopped performing and touring since. Nelson Mandela, after hearing Benjamin's tribute to him while he was in prison, requested an introduction to the poet that grew into a lifelong relationship, inspiring Benjamin's work with children in South Africa.

CELEBRATION

Benjamin would also go on to be the first artist to record with The Wailers after the death of Bob Marley in a musical tribute to Nelson Mandela. His story is a celebration of a truly extraordinary life story which remarks upon the power of poetry and the importance of pushing boundaries with the arts.

Remarkably, the genesis of Benjamin's new book can be traced directly back to the last time he played in Shrewsbury. There, he met a writer friend who encouraged him to start mapping out the details of his life. The process took more years than Benjamin imagined, but he's delighted to have completed his autobiography and is looking forward to sharing his stories at local theatres.

He says: "The work is an autobiography and a social history. They say you mellow with age, but, if anything, I'm angrier than I've ever been. There is still injustice, there is still hate, there is still intolerance. The Life and Rhymes is about the race riots, the struggle to free Mandela, my career as writer and poet, and much more. It charts my course through a changing political and cultural landscape. I'd always been asked by a literary agent to write an autobiography but I guess I was too busy and just didn't have time. Then, in recent years, the time felt right. A lot has happened in my life but a lot has happened in the country too."

● **For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.**

Humdrum life? No way! I enjoy it

Ian has a blast as The Humdrum Express

Lacking excitement or variety; boringly monotonous' – it's not the usual way to describe yourself. Humdrum is also probably the last thing you'd want people to call your work, but Ian Passey doesn't care.

Known for his fast-paced lyrical style, Ian – better known as The Humdrum Express – is a man on a mission.

"I chose the name because my initial plan was to write mini kitchen sink dramas set to music," he says. "It can also be perceived as a boring newspaper [not the Star, we hope] or a commuter train, which fitted in nicely with my idea of writing about having to go to work every day."

Born in Quinton, he's spent most of his later life around the Wyre Forest. First of all in Bewdley, he now resides in Kidderminster.

"I'm currently a screen printer by day which allows me plenty of thinking time to come up with song ideas.

"I played in a few bands initially. Smedley, Jackpot and Swagger all gigged regularly across the Midlands during the 90s. After taking a break, I rediscovered a love for songwriting which eventually led to becoming The Humdrum Express. Ten years and five albums later, I'm enjoying it more than ever."

FRUSTRATION

He counts the likes of John Cooper Clarke, Ian Dury and the Blockheads, Half Man Half Biscuit and Sleaford Mods amongst his influences. So it is little surprise satire and political swipes form a part of his repertoire.

"I don't really consider myself to be a political artist," says a man who describes his age as 'old enough to know better'. "Even the term 'social observer' sits uncomfortably but I suppose I set myself up for it. Reviews tend to mention the words 'acerbic' or 'sardonic' which always raises a smile. I like to mix humour with familiar cultural references, or create fictional characters eager to share their bitter-sweet tales of delusion."

So like those listed above, can we assume that Ian views the world with an air of frustration? "I suppose so. It was never a plan to write in this way but it's something that has evolved over time. It's also an outlet that gives me opportunities to meet others with a similar feeling of exasperation. There's a sense of making the most of difficult circumstances."

Ian is a keen member of his community and likes to take a look at the issues which affect his corner of Worcestershire, too. This stretches into his work in more ways than one. Take the video for his latest single, E-Petition. He used Stourbridge as the filming location. But anybody who might have been popping into town that day would have been in for a bit of a shock.

"The video for E-Petition was filmed on a Sunday afternoon. We had a cast of 60 people dressed as zombies rampaging through the High Street which was such fun to film.

"I really enjoy getting others involved and I'm always humbled by how many are willing to go along with the ideas with such enthusiasm." And as for the single itself, he added: "It's had prime time BBC 6 Music airplay and has been very well received."

RESPECT

The E-Petition video also saw him rekindle a bromance with local musician, critic, actor and filmmaker Nick Townsend, who many may know as the frontman of Kidderminster band Weak13.

"It's great to see Weak13 doing well at the moment and he seems to be gaining huge respect for his filmmaking too. I can't think of anyone who works harder for fellow bands with his reviews, advice and, of course, his fantastic videos. We'll definitely team up again.

"I recently put a band together for a show at The Rose Theatre in Kidderminster featuring members of a couple of my favourite acts, Flying Ant Day and Sleuth. When schedules allow, we're planning four or five dates next year as a full band which I'm looking forward to immensely. I love playing my solo gigs but to have the option of doing something different with the songs is both fresh and inspiring.

"It's been a very busy year and I'm finally able to enjoy spending a bit of time writing again," he admits, amongst his promotion duties for E-Petition.

"I've got a couple of gigs with two of my lyrical heroes early in the new year, with Attila the Stockbroker in Stourbridge and Half Man Half Biscuit at The Robin 2. I've been lucky enough to play with them both before and they're ones I always look forward to both as a performer and a fan. I'm not sure whether a new album is immediately on the cards."

LEIGH SANDERS

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SATURDAY'S TV DECEMBER 30

CHOICE

Alan Carr

The Price Is Right (Channel 4, 8pm)

It's been called the world's longest-running game show – it first appeared on US TV in 1956 – but The Price is Right hasn't been on UK TV screens in a decade. However, that's all about to change as Alan Carr brings the format back for this one-off special, which, if successful, could lead to a new series. The presenter is following in the footsteps of Leslie Crowther, Bruce Forsyth and Joe Pasquale as he invites a group of lucky contestants to ëcome on down!' and guess the price of a selection of weird and wonderful prizes. If they're lucky, they'll also get to spin the big wheel and go through to the showcase showdown. Carr will also be presiding over such classic Price is Right games as Time Flies, Plinko and Cliffhanger.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen. **11.30** Nigel Slater's New Year Suppers. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15 Film:** 102 Dalmatians. (2000) **2.50 Film:** Penguins of Madagascar. (2014) **4.10** Final Score. **5.30** BBC News. **5.40** Regional Programme. **5.50** Celebrity Mastermind.

6.20 Pointless Celebrities. Alexander Armstrong and Richard Osman present a Radio 2-themed edition of the unorthodox quiz, featuring Jo Whiley, Jeremy Vine, Zoe Ball, Michael Ball, Ken Bruce, Vanessa Feltz and Craig Charles. (R)

7.10 A Christmas Carol Goes Wrong. The Olivier Award-winning Mischief Theatre Company returns to the small screen with another festive spoof. After mauling JM Barrie's classic Peter Pan last year, disaster-prone am-dram troupe the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society has been blacklisted by the BBC. Determined not to accept the ban without a fight, the group resolves to force itself back onto the screen by hijacking the jewel in the corporation's Christmas crown – a live production of A Christmas Carol, staged by an infinitely more esteemed cast. What follows is an anarchic hour of TV in which the performers quickly find themselves out of their depth, with no idea how to direct a live studio, or handle the special effects necessary to bring Dickens' perennial festive favourite to life. Plus, there's the small matter of the real cast, who are less than impressed at having their screen-time stolen by a band of inept replacements.

8.00 Film: Avengers: Age of Ultron. (2015) Premiere. The superhero team faces a threat from within when Iron Man creates an artificial intelligence to take their place protecting the world. The android grows resentful of his creators, and decides his mission is best accomplished by wiping out the human race. Meanwhile, a pair of vengeful superpowered twins seeks to turn the Avengers against each other. Sci-fi adventure sequel, starring Robert Downey Jr.

10.10 BBC News; Weather.; National Lottery Update.

10.30 Match of the Day.

11.55 The NFL Show.

12.25 Film: Dinner for Schmucks. (2010) **2.15** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.20** BBC News.

BBC2

6.35 Birds of Paradise: The Ultimate Quest. (R) **7.35 Film:** Tinker Bell and the Pirate Fairy. (2014) **8.45** The Big Family Cooking Showdown. (R) **9.45** Snow Leopard – Beyond the Myth: Natural World. (R) **10.35** Jane Austen: Behind Closed Doors. (R) **11.35 Film:** Mansfield Park. (1999) **1.20** The World's Most Extraordinary Homes. (R) **2.20** Six Robots & Us. (R) **3.20 Film:** All About Eve. (1950) Drama, starring Bette Davis. **5.35** Talking Pictures: Barry Norman.

6.20 Film: Alice in Wonderland. (2010) A 19-year-old Alice returns to the magical land, having forgotten her previous adventures. She finds the tyrannical Red Queen has begun a reign of terror that can only be ended by slaying the monstrous Jabberwocky – a task she is seemingly destined to attempt. Tim Burton's fantasy adventure based on Lewis Carroll's novels, starring Mia Wasikowska, Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter and Anne Hathaway.

8.00 Dad's Army. Mainwaring orders his blundering platoon to guard the bank's money until repairs on the bomb-damaged vault are completed. Comedy, starring Arthur Lowe and John Le Mesurier. (R)

8.30 Grand Tours of Scotland's Lochs. New series. Paul Murton begins an exploration of the nation's lochs by travelling through the wilds surrounding Loch Etive, taking in the Falls of Lora and Rannoch Moor.

9.00 Feud: Bette and Joan. As the 35th Academy Awards approach, Joan enlists the aid of Hedda to help thwart Bette's chances of claiming a record-breaking third Oscar for her role in Baby Jane.

9.45 Feud: Bette and Joan. Warner pressures Aldrich to reunite his original Baby Jane team for a follow-up "hag horror" picture. Meanwhile, a face from Joan's past poses a threat.

10.30 Film: Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte. (1964) A reclusive Southern belle trying to save her family home is driven to the brink of madness by memories of her traumatic past. Thriller, with Bette Davis and Olivia De Havilland.

12.40 Absolutely Fashion: Inside British Vogue. (R) **1.40** Sign Zone: Mary, Mel & Sue's Big Christmas Thank You. (R) **2.40** Rick Stein's Road to Mexico. (R) **3.40** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dana. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister Six. **7.20** The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.30** The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.45** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.00** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.15** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.30** The Aquabats! Super Show! (R) **8.55** Scrambled!'s Shiniest Showdown Ever. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Saturday Morning with James Martin at Christmas. **11.25** Endeavour. (R) **1.15** ITV News; Weather. **1.30** The Chase. (R) **2.30 Film:** Three Men and a Baby. (1987) Comedy, starring Tom Selleck, Ted Danson and Steve Guttenberg. **4.25 Film:** Despicable Me 2. (2013) Animated comedy sequel, with the voice of Steve Carell.

6.10 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.20 ITV News; Weather.

6.30 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway Presents – Who Shot Simon Cowell? The complete series of sketches from the 2016 run of the entertainment show.

7.00 Guess the Star. Jonathan Ross hosts a special one-off game show in which three teams of celebrities are challenged to guess the true identity of various famous faces, who have been transformed into their musical heroes for a special performance. Team Diversity, made up of Jordan Banjo, Perri Kiely and Sam Craske take on Anthony Cotton, Catherine Tyldesley and Sally Dynevor of Team Coronation Street, and Team Daytime, represented by Eamonn Holmes, Stacey Solomon and Judge Rinder.

8.00 Film: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1. (2010) The dark lord Voldemort rises to ultimate power over the magical world, so the teenage wizard and his friends set out on a mission to find the magical horcruxes – artefacts containing parts of the evil wizard's soul that hold the key to destroying him. The first half of the two-part conclusion to the fantasy saga, starring Daniel Radcliffe, Ralph Fiennes, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint.

10.40 ITV News; Weather.

11.00 Film: The Mask. (1994) Comic-book comedy, starring Jim Carrey and Cameron Diaz.

12.50 Jackpot247. **3.00** Babushka. (R) **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

7.05 Film: Bridge to Terabithia. (2007) Fantasy drama, starring Josh Hutcherson. **8.50** Lego Masters. (R) **9.55** The Simpsons. (R) **10.25** The Simpsons. (R) **10.50** The Simpsons. (R) **11.20** The Simpsons. (R) **11.50** We're Going on a Bear Hunt. (R) **12.20** Born Silly. (R) **12.50 Film:** Ever After: A Cinderella Story. (1998) Romantic drama, starring Drew Barrymore and Dougray Scott. **3.15 Film:** Pride & Prejudice. (2005) Period drama, starring Keira Knightley. **5.40** Channel 4 News. **5.55 Film:** Crocodile Dundee II. (1988) The rugged Australian adventurer sets out to save his reporter girlfriend from New York drug dealers. Having rescued her from their clutches, he realises they will soon be coming after him – so he decides to even the odds by luring them to the Outback for a final showdown. Comedy adventure sequel, starring Paul Hogan, Linda Kozlowski, John Meillon and Charles S Dutton.

8.00 The Price Is Right. Alan Carr invites five lucky members of the studio audience to 'Come on Down' for a special edition of the world's longest-running TV game show.

9.00 Film: The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1. (2014) Katniss Everdeen is brought to a secretive underground society following the destruction of the televised deathmatch. She becomes the figurehead of a revolution against the despotic Panem regime, while her friend Peeta remains a captive of its tyrannical president. Part one of the two-part conclusion to the sci-fi adventure series, starring Jennifer Lawrence, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Julianne Moore and Donald Sutherland.

11.20 Film: Speed. (1994) An LAPD cop discovers a psychotic criminal has planted a bomb on a crowded bus, primed to go off if the vehicle drops below 50mph. He boards the vehicle and helps a hapless passenger who has been forced to take the wheel and keep a constant speed to avoid a disaster. Action thriller, starring Keanu Reeves, Sandra Bullock, Dennis Hopper and Jeff Daniels.

1.25 Speed with Guy Martin. (R) **2.20** Hollyoaks. Omnibus. Brody finds out that Maggie has cancer. **4.05** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. (R) **5.00** Four in a Bed. (R) **5.25** Kirstie's Handmade Christmas. (R) **5.45 Film:** The Four Musketeers. (1974)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.15** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.50 Film:** The African Queen. (1951) **12.55 Film:** Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes. (1984) Drama, starring Christopher Lambert. **3.30** Live Aviva Premiership Rugby Union. Harlequins v Northampton Saints (Kick-off 4.00pm).

6.05 World's Strongest Man 2017. Action from the fourth heat in Botswana, which featured Britain's Eddie Hall – a four-time winner of Britain's Strongest Man who finished third in the 2016 competition.

7.00 Blind Date. Paul O'Grady returns as host for another series of the revived dating show. As ever, three singletons are challenged to prove their worth as romance prospects to a potential suitor by their personality alone. In this opening edition, the singles bring their dogs along in the hopes of scoring some "puppy love", and self-described diva Devorshka must choose between a plumber, a banker and an accountant.

8.00 Greatest Celebrity Wind-Ups Ever! New series. Joe Pasquale narrates a special documentary celebrating some of the greatest pranks celebrities have managed to play on each other. Highlights include Ant and Dec setting up Simon Cowell in a classic Saturday Night Takeaway moment he would probably rather forget, and Eurovision winner Cheryl Baker falling victim to one of Noel Edmonds' "Gotcha" tricks. Ben Hanlin talks viewers through an elaborate hoax he pullled on former King of the Jungle Joe Swash, and more practical jokes come courtesy of Freddie Flintoff, Little Mix, and Game of Thrones' pint-sized trickster Maisie Williams.

9.00 5 News Weekend.

9.05 Football on 5: The Championship. Colin Murray introduces highlights from the weekend's games in the Championship, including Middlesbrough v Aston Villa at the Riverside Stadium, Birmingham City v Leeds United at St Andrew's.

10.15 Football on 5: Goal Rush.

10.45 How Magic Changed TV. The story of magic on television. (R)

12.15 SuperCasino. **3.10** Our Dream Hotel. **4.45** House Doctor. (R) **5.10** Wildlife SOS. (R) **5.35** Chinese Food in Minutes. (R) **5.50** Access. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 Tutankhamun: The Truth Uncovered **7.30** Planet Earth II: A World of Wonder **9.00** Spiral **11.05** 2017: A Year in the Life of a Year **11.35** Glen Campbell: The Rhinestone Cowboy **12.35** Chuck Berry in Concert **1.35** Tutankhamun: The Truth Uncovered **2.35** Planet Earth II: A World of Wonder **3.35** Close

ITV2

2.20 Mr Bean **3.20 Film:** Bean (1997) **4.25** FYI Daily **4.30 Film:** Bean (1997) **5.10 Film:** Ella Enchanted (2004) **6.15** FYI Daily **6.20 Film:** Ella Enchanted (2004) **7.00 Film:** Legally Blonde (2001) **8.00** FYI Daily **8.05 Film:** Legally Blonde (2001) **9.00 Film:** Bridesmaids (2011) **10.00** FYI Daily **10.05 Film:** Bridesmaids (2011) **11.35** Family Guy **12.30** American Dad! **1.25** Celebrity Juice: Bestest of the Unseenest Bits **2.25** Celebrity Juice: The Special Special **3.15** Through the Keyhole **4.10** Educating Joey Essex: Football Fever

ITV3

1.10 The Making of The Sound of Music Live **1.40 Film:** Bugsy Malone (1976) **2.40** FYI Daily **2.45 Film:** Bugsy Malone (1976) **3.45 Film:** The Wizard of Oz (1939) **4.45** FYI Daily **4.50 Film:** The Wizard of Oz (1939) **5.50** Prince Harry and Meghan: Truly, Madly, Deeply **6.55** Kate: The Making of a Modern Queen **7.55** Diana: A Life After Death **9.00** Midsomer Murders **11.00** Lewis **1.00** Housewife, 49 **2.55** Agatha Christie's Marple **4.35** Wycliffe

ITV4

11.20 Ironside **1.30** ITV Racing: Live from Newbury. **4.00 Film:** 633 Squadron (1964) **5.05** FYI Daily **5.10 Film:** 633 Squadron (1964) **5.55 Film:** Aces High (1976) **7.00** FYI Daily **7.05 Film:** Aces High (1976) **8.15 Film:** Jackie Chan's First Strike (1996) **9.15** FYI Daily **9.20 Film:** Jackie Chan's First Strike (1996) **10.00 Film:** Swordfish (2001) **11.00** FYI Daily **11.05 Film:** Swordfish (2001) **12.05 Film:** The Dirty Dozen (1967) **1.05** FYI Daily **1.10 Film:** The Dirty Dozen (1967) **3.05** The Classic Car Show **3.55** Goodwood Festival of Speed **4.45** Goodwood Revival **5.30** Tommy Cooper

E4

11.15 Film: Dr Dolittle (1998) **1.00** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas **1.30 Film:** Toy Story OF TERROR! (2013) **2.00 Film:** Toy Story That Time Forgot (2014) **2.30** Toy Story Toons **3.00** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: V Is for Valentino the Rabbit **4.00** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: W Is for Weddings

be hot! with Slimming World

MONDAY
OPEN BANK HOLIDAY MONDAYS

****NEW GROUP STARTING 1ST JANUARY****
MOXLEY
Moxley People Centre
3 Queen Street @ 7.30pm
Contact Debbie 07850 243096

GREAT BRIDGE
St Peter's Church Hall,
Whitehall Road, @ 5.30pm and 7:30pm
Contact Jodie 07886 426429
WEDNESBURY
Central Methodist Church (Wesley Centre)
Spring Head @ 7.30pm
Contact Richard 07535 025298
OLDBURY
St James C of E Church,
Shelsley Avenue, @ 7.00pm
Contact Claire 07539 950447
ROWLEY REGIS
Dudley Golf Club
Turners Hill, B65 9DP @ 7.00pm
Contact Sarah 07875 445462
OLDBURY
Church on the Rock,
Warley Road, Rood End @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Lorraine 07434 728698

TUESDAY
BRADLEY
St Martin's Church
Slater Street, @ 9.30am AND 11.30am
Contact Pippa 07816 900149
BRADLEY
St Martin's Church
Slater Street, @ 5.30pm AND 7.30pm
Contact Sarah 07714 743278
OLDBURY
Warley Baptist Church,
Castle Road East, @ 9.30am, 3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Julie 07505 084916
WEST BROMWICH
West Bromwich Community Centre,
Gayton Road, @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Jodie 07886 426429

WEST BROMWICH
West Bromwich Leisure Centre,
Moor Street, @ 9.30am, 3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Mandy 07592 508852
WEDNESBURY
Woods Methodist Church
Coronation Road, Woods Estate, @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Karen 07547 515345
TIPTON
Tipton Christian Church
Waterloo Street, 3.00 pm, 5.00pm and 7.00pm
Contact Lisa 07514 607650
OLDBURY
Sainsbury's, Freeth Street,
@ 5.30pm & 7.30pm
Contact Ann 07815 643963
DARLASTON
Darlaston Sports & Social Club Ltd,
16 The Leys, @ 9.30am, 11.30am, 3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Lesley 01922 634883
ROWLEY REGIS
Rowley Regis Disability Centre, (next to Tesco Express)
26 Rowley Village, B65 9AT 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Kenton 07982 408088
OLDBURY
Church on the Rock,
Warley Road, Rood End @ 9.15am and 11.15am
Contact Lorraine 07434 728698

WEDNESDAY
****NEW CONSULTANT STARTING 3RD JANUARY****
BILSTON
Lunt Community Centre
Lunt Road @ 7.30pm
Contact Alison 07736 781487

WEST BROMWICH
West Bromwich Community Centre,
Gayton Road, @ 9.30am
Contact Jodie 07886 426429
DARLASTON
Darlaston Sports & Social Club Ltd,
16 The Leys, @ 9.30am
Contact Lesley 01922 634883
TIPTON
Brook Street Community Centre
3, Brook Street, @ 9.00am, 11.00am, 1.00pm, 3.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Lorretta 07968 656634

SMETHWICK
Dorothy Parkes Centre,
Church Road, 9.30am, 11.30am, 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Mel 07935 447265
WEDNESBURY
Woods Methodist Church
Coronation Road, Woods Estate, @ 9.30am
Contact Karen 07547 515345
WEDNESBURY
St Barts Church Hall
Bttm Church Hill @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Jenny 0121 556 5909

****NEW CONSULTANT STARTING 3RD JANUARY****
WEDNESBURY
St Luke's Church, Elwell Street,
Mesty Croft, 5.00pm & 7.00pm
Contact Heidi 07972 530778

BLACKHEATH
Blackheath Central Meth Church,
High Street, @ 9.30am, 11.30pm, 5.00pm and 7.00pm
Contact Ann 07815 643963
OLDBURY
****NEW VENUE FROM 3RD JANUARY****
Portway Lifestyle Centre,
Newbury Lane, B69 1HE @ 9.00am and 11.00am
Contact Kenton 07982 408088

THURSDAY
****NEW CONSULTANT STARTING 4TH JANUARY****
TIPTON
The Harrier Pub (Separate entrance),
Powis Avenue, @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Tracey 07505 706832

WEDNESBURY
St Bart's Church Hall,
Bttm Church Hill @ 9.15am
Contact Jenny 07751 259593
OLDBURY
Portway Lifestle Centre,
Newbury Lane @ 5.00pm & 7.00pm
Contact Claire 07539 950447
WEDNESBURY
Lea Brook Church Hall
Leabrood Road North @ 7.30pm
Contact Lin 07902 079559

TIVIDALE
Ormaston Sandwell Community Academy
Lower City Road @ 7.00pm
Contact Sarah 07875 445462
WEST BROMWICH
Stone Cross Library
Beverley Road @ 9.00am, 11.00am and 1.00pm
Contact Lisa 07514 607650
BRANDHALL
Kings Community Church,
Oak Tree Centre, Tame Road @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Ann 07815 643963
TIPTON
The Harrier Pub (Separate entrance),
Powis Avenue, @ 9.00am and 11.00am
Contact Lin 07902 079559
WEST BROMWICH
Stone Cross Library,
Beverley Road, @ 5.30pm and 7.30pm
Contact Carole 07854 413929

FRIDAY
SMETHWICK
Dorothy Parkes Centre,
Church Road, 9.30am.
Contact Mel 07935 447265
ROWLEY REGIS
Rowley Regis Disability Centre, (next to Tesco Express)
26 Rowley Village, B65 9AT 9.30am
Contact Kenton 07982 408088

SATURDAY
WEDNESBURY
Lea Brook Church Hall,
Leabrook Road North @ 8.00am
Contact Lin 07902 079559
DARLASTON
Darlaston Sports & Social Club Ltd,
16 The Leys, @ 9.00am and 11.00am
Contact Lesley 01922 634883
OLDBURY
Portway Lifestyle Centre,
Newbury Lane, B69 1HE @ 9.00am and 11.00am
Contact Kenton 07982 408088
OLDBURY
Peters Well Community Centre
(Lightwoods Primary School)
Clent Road, B68 9ER @ 8.00am and 10.00am
Contact Maddie 07815 132320

Or just come along Job opportunities for past and present members in this area contact Jenny on 07751 259593 for more details.

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NEW YEAR'S EVE

CHOICE

Jools Holland

Jools' Annual Hootenanny (BBC2, 11.20pm)
Jools Holland presents his 25th annual New Year party, headlined this year by Ed Sheeran, who performs tracks from his recent album Divide with the Rhythm & Blues Orchestra, as well as a cover of a classic British rock song. Other acts taking to the stage tonight include Mavis Staples, Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, Jessie Ware, Soul II Soul, Beth Ditto, the Beat starring Dave Wakelin, George McCrae, Jose Feliciano and Ruby Turner, while the Pipes & Drums of the 1st Battalion Scots Guards will be on hand at midnight to play in the new year.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **8.00** Match of the Day. (R) **9.25 Film:** Bolt. (2008) **10.55 Film:** The Croods. (2013) **12.25** BBC News; Weather. **12.40** Comic Relief 2017: 'Twas the Thanks After Red Nose Day. (R) **1.40 Film:** Bedknobs and Broomsticks. (1971) **3.35** Songs of Praise: The Big Sing. **4.05** Top of the Pops New Year Special. **5.05** Attenborough and the Giant Elephant. (R)

6.05 BBC News.

6.20 Regional Programme.

6.30 Celebrity Mastermind. Sky News political editor Faisal Islam, comedian Lloyd Langford, Made in Chelsea's Ollie Locke and Saturday Mash-Up presenter Yasmin Evans put their knowledge to the test.

7.00 Countryfile. Adam Henson takes a trip to New Zealand, where he helps with a cattle muster, goes on the hunt for a rare breed of goat, and witnesses large-scale sheep farming.

8.00 Antiques Roadshow. Fiona Bruce presents a special episode from the set of EastEnders celebrating the history of film, theatre, music and television, in which iconic props are brought in to be valued.

9.00 The Real Marigold on Tour. Rosemary Shrager, Sheila Ferguson, Paul Nicholas and Dennis Taylor explore Thailand, where they try their hands at tai chi and take part in a Ladyboys show. Last in the series.

10.00 BBC News; Weather.

10.20 The Graham Norton Show. Graham is joined by the stars of The Greatest Showman, Hugh Jackman, Zendaya and Zac Efron, as well as Gary Oldman and Suranne Jones. With music by the Leading Ladies.

11.20 Nile Rodgers & Chic: Good Times 2017. The musician and his funk band perform live as the year draws to a close. Featuring footage of the traditional New Year's fireworks display, choreographed to fit a medley of music.

11.55 New Year's Eve Fireworks 2017. The annual celebratory New Year's Eve fireworks display, live from the Thames Embankment in London.

12.10 Nile Rodgers & Chic: Good Times 2018. **12.50** Michael McIntyre: Happy & Glorious. (R) **1.50 Film:** Old School. (2003) **3.20** Weather for the Week Ahead. **3.25** BBC News.

BBC2

6.35 Birds of Paradise: The Ultimate Quest. (R) **7.35 Film:** Mars Needs Moms. (2011) Animated sci-fi adventure, with the voice of Seth Robert Dusky. **9.00** The Big Family Cooking Showdown. (R) **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.30** The A to Z of TV Cooking. (R) **12.15 Film:** Shall We Dance? (2004) Romantic comedy, starring Richard Gere and Susan Sarandon. **1.55** Six Robots & Us. (R) **2.55** Talking Pictures: Anthony Hopkins. (R) **3.40 Film:** 84 Charing Cross Road. (1987) Romantic drama, starring Anne Bancroft and Anthony Hopkins. **5.15 Film:** Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time. (2010) A prince framed for murdering his adoptive father must stop a magical weapon from falling into the wrong hands. Fantasy adventure, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Gemma Arterton.

7.00 Robot Wars Special. More motorised mayhem as radio-controlled robots vie for places in the final battle arena.

8.00 Film: Into the Woods. (2014) Premiere. A wicked witch agrees to lift a curse on a young couple if they will help restore her once beautiful looks. Musical fantasy, based on Stephen Sondheim's hit stage show, which entwines the fairy tale stories of Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk and Rapunzel. Starring Meryl Streep, James Corden and Emily Blunt, with a cameo by Johnny Depp as the Big Bad Wolf.

10.00 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the day's Premier League action, featuring Crystal Palace v Manchester City and West Bromwich Albion v Arsenal.

10.50 Live at the Apollo. Henning Wehn hosts tonight's show, which features performances from Lucy Porter and Guz Khan.

11.20 Jools' Annual Hootenanny. Jools Holland presents his 25th annual New Year party, featuring performances from Ed Sheeran, Mavis Staples, Beth Ditto, Ruby Turner, Jessie Ware and Soul II Soul.

1.20 Best of Glastonbury 2017. Jo Whiley and Mark Radcliffe introduce highlights from the festival at Worthy Farm in Somerset. (R) **3.25** Sign Zone: Countryfile. John Craven, Anita Rani and Matt Baker present a special festive episode. (R) **4.20** This Is BBC Two. Preview of upcoming programmes.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dana. (R) **6.45** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Ultimate Spider-Man Vs The Sinister Six. **7.20** The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.30** The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.45** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.00** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.15** Horrid Henry. (R) **8.30** A Grizzly New Year's Tale: The Crystal Eye. (R) **8.55** Scrambled! Record Breakers. **9.25** Countrywise. (R) **9.50 Film:** Casino Royale. (1967) Spoof James Bond adventure, starring David Niven. **12.25** ITV News; Weather. **12.30** All Star Musicals. (R) **2.20** A Very Royal Wedding. (R) **3.30** A Right Royal Quiz. **4.30** Victoria. (R)

6.25 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.35 ITV News; Weather.

6.50 Cannonball Splash Hits. Andrew Flintoff presents highlights from the first series of the action-packed game show, in which 24 contestants are tasked with traversing a series of water-based challenges and custom-made inflatable obstacles, each designed to test speed, accuracy, height and distance. With contributions from regulars Frankie Bridge, Radzi Chinyanganya, Ryan Hand and Maya Jama.

7.50 Film: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2. (2011) The young wizard continues his search for the artefacts containing fragments of the dark lord Voldemort's soul. Time is running out, as the evil sorcerer is aware of Harry's mission, and marshals his forces for a final, devastating attack on Harry and his friends at Hogwarts school. Conclusion of the fantasy saga, with Daniel Radcliffe, Ralph Fiennes, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson and Alan Rickman.

10.15 The Real Full Monty. Alexander Armstrong and Ashley Banjo lead a group of male celebrities as they recreate the famous striptease from The Full Monty to raise awareness of men's health issues. (R)

11.45 ITV News; Weather; New Year Bongs.

12.10 Film: Parenthood. (1989) Comedy drama, starring Steve Martin. **2.15** Take Me Out. Four more suitors seek the approval of Paddy McGuinness's 30 single women. (R) **3.20** Through the Keyhole. (R) **4.10** ITV Nightscreen. Text-based information service.

CHANNEL 4

7.35 Frasier. (R) **8.00** Frasier. (R) **8.25** F1 2017: Hamilton's Record Breaking Season. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** The Simpsons. (R) **12.55** The Simpsons. (R) **1.25** The Simpsons. (R) **1.55 Film:** We Bought a Zoo. (2011) Fact-based comedy drama, starring Matt Damon. **4.20** Channel 4 News. **4.25** Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast. (R) **5.25** Britain's Wildest Weather 2017. (R)

7.00 Amazing Spaces Snow and Ice Special. Architect George Clarke and master craftsman Will Hardie find out how Norway, a country with some of the harshest weather on the planet, has become a leader in architectural design. Buildings include a treehouse that can withstand nine tons of snowfall and gale force winds, and an ice hotel complete with 30 rooms, a bar and even a snow chapel. Plus, a moveable home that has kept members of its community safe for hundreds of years. (R)

8.00 The Crystal Maze: Celebrity Christmas Special. Richard Ayoade hosts the game show, inviting the Saturdays and Strictly star Mollie King, gold medal-winning athletes Ellie Simmonds and Nicola Adams, Made in Chelsea's Ollie Locke and Murder In Successville comedian Tom Davis to take his golden hand and tackle a number of physical, skill, mystery and mental challenges. Their aim is to win the elusive crystals – and the more they win, the more time they get in the Crystal Dome, where they will be raising money for Stand Up for Cancer. With appearances from Adam Buxton and Jessica Hynes. (R)

9.00 Alan Carr's New Year Specstacular 2017. The presenter hosts his annual New Year's party, with a mixture of sketches and party games. Alan is joined by guests Big Narstie, Jonnie Peacock, Keith Lemon, Caroline Flack, Alex Brooker, Binky Felstead, Tom Davis, Charlotte Dawson, Kim Woodburn and Liam Charles, with music from Stefflon Don and Pete Tong, with Becky Hill and The Heritage Orchestra, conducted by Jules Buckley.

11.00 Big Fat Quiz of the Year 2017. Jimmy Carr hosts a comedy quiz looking back at the past 12 months. (R)

1.00 Gogglebox 2017. (R) **2.55** The Crystal Maze: Celebrity Special. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Little Princess. **6.15** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.25** Poppy Cat. (R) **6.35** Wissper. (R) **6.40** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.45** Milkshake! Bopping About. (R) **6.55** Simon. (R) **7.00** Peppa Pig. (R) **7.05** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.15** Thomas & Friends. (R) **7.30** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.45** Olly the Little White Van. (R) **7.55** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.25** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.35** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **9.00** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.10** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.25** Digby Dragon. (R) **9.45** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.55** Peppa Pig. (R) **10.00** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.35** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.25** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **12.00** Winter in Alaska. (R) **12.55 Film:** Three Men and a Little Lady. (1990) Comedy sequel, starring Tom Selleck. **2.55 Film:** Groundhog Day. (1993) Comedy, starring Bill Murray. **3.55** 5 News Update. **4.00 Film:** Groundhog Day. (1993) Concluded. **4.55** 5 News Weekend. **5.00 Film:** The Lego Movie. (2014) Premiere. Animated comedy.

7.00 The Lego Story: Brick by Brick. Documentary charting the history of the toy, looking at how the seemingly humble bricks have been developed and adapted over the decades into one of the world's most popular brands. (R)

8.00 World's Strongest Man 2017. Action from the fifth heat in Botswana, which featured Lithuania's Zydrunas Savickas, a four-time winner who was returning from an injury that kept him out of the 2016 event.

8.50 5 News Weekend.

9.00 All New When TV Goes Horribly Wrong. Richard Bacon narrates a compilation of disasters befalling TV presenters, featuring mishaps involving Phillip Schofield, Anne Diamond, Denis Tuohy, Ross King, Charlotte Crosby and Stephen Bear, as well as other presenters from around the world. The show looks back at technical problems on the opening night of BBC2 and some unexpected nudity on daytime TV.

11.55 Aviva Premiership Rugby Highlights. Mark Durden-Smith and David Flatman present action from the 12th round of matches, including Bath v Wasps, Gloucester v Sale Sharks and Saracens v Worcester Warriors.

12.50 SuperCasino. **3.10** World's Strongest Man 2017. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 Dancing the Nutcracker – Inside the Royal Ballet **8.30** Victoria Wood: Seen on TV **10.00** Detectorists **1.00** Victoria Wood: Seen on TV **2.30** David Attenborough's Zoo Quest in Colour **4.00** Close

ITV2

12.25 You've Been Framed! Top 100 Animals **1.30** Mr Bean **2.30 Film:** Happy Feet Two (2011) **3.30** FYI Daily **3.35 Film:** Happy Feet Two (2011) **4.35 Film:** Nanny McPhee (2005) **5.35** FYI Daily **5.40 Film:** Nanny McPhee (2005) **6.40 Film:** New Year's Eve (2011) **7.40** FYI Daily **7.45 Film:** New Year's Eve (2011) **9.00 Film:** Sherlock Holmes (2009) **10.00** FYI Daily **10.05 Film:** Sherlock Holmes (2009) **11.35** Family Guy **2.00** American Dad! **2.55** Celebrity Juice: Bestest Bits 2017

ITV3

11.55 FYI Daily **12.00 Film:** Carry On Doctor (1967) **12.50 Film:** Carry On Again Doctor (1969) **1.55** FYI Daily **2.00 Film:** Carry On Again Doctor (1969) **2.35 Film:** The Likely Lads (1976) **3.35** FYI Daily **3.40 Film:** The Likely Lads (1976) **4.25** Lewis **6.25** Diana, Our Mother: Her Life and Legacy **8.00** Midsomer Murders **10.00** My Boy Jack **12.00** Christmas Epic Fails **1.00** The Knock **3.55** Jane Eyre

ITV4

1.55 Film: Lawman (1971) **2.55** FYI Daily **3.00 Film:** Lawman (1971) **4.00 Film:** The Train Robbers (1973) **5.05** FYI Daily **5.10 Film:** The Train Robbers (1973) **5.50 Film:** Jeremiah Johnson (1972) **6.55** FYI Daily **7.00 Film:** Jeremiah Johnson (1972) **8.05 Film:** Jaws: The Revenge (1987) **9.10** FYI Daily **9.15 Film:** Jaws: The Revenge (1987) **10.00 Film:** Total Recall (1990) **11.00** FYI Daily **11.05 Film:** Total Recall (1990) **12.10 Film:** Species III (2004) **1.10** FYI Daily **1.15 Film:** Species III (2004)

E4

3.00 The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: F Is for Fun with Flags **3.30** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: G Is for Geology **4.00** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: H Is for Hoarding **4.30** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: I Is for Intimacy **5.00** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: J Is for Junior Professor **5.30** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: K Is for Knocking **6.00** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: L Is for Laundry **6.30** The Big Bang Theory: Big Bang A-Z: M Is for Meemaw **7.00 Film:** I, Robot (2004) **9.00 Film:** Red (2010) **11.15** The Inbetweeners **2.40** 8 Out of 10 Cats: More Best Bits **3.20** Hollyoaks

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Sandwell Chronicle Thursday, December 28, 2017

The new Nissan Micra is, quite simply, a revolution

Micra's 1.0-litre engine provides outstanding urban performance

By James Parker

The entry level 1.0-litre version of the all-new Nissan Micra is playing a key role in the hatchback's sales success.

Customers are clearly impressed with its perfect balance of urban performance and low running costs.

The highly efficient 71PS three-cylinder unit has accounted for 20 per cent of orders across Europe since it went on sale earlier this year. However, that figure is forecast to rise even higher, to 23 per cent by next March – the end of FY17.

With approximately 46,000 new Micras sold, it means close to 10,000 customers are already enjoying the 1.0 engine's frugal performance. Naturally aspirated, the engine is linked to a five-speed manual transmission. This powertrain results in official Combined Cycle fuel economy of 4.6 litres/100km and CO2 emissions of 103g/km when running on 15 or 16-inch wheels.

The 1.0-litre 71PS is one of three refined engines which available on the all-new Micra. The others are a 0.9-litre 90PS three-cylinder turbo petrol and the 1.5-litre 90PS four-cylinder diesel.

The car has athletic and expressive design

Offering a 71PS engine makes the Micra more accessible than ever before. It extends Nissan's coverage within the European B-hatchback segment to 65% of all vehicles sold.

With more than half of all European B-hatchback vehicles sold in the 61-100PS category, the Micra is perfectly positioned to meet the needs of small car consumers.

The 1.0-litre 71PS engine is available on three grades, from entry level Visia to mid-range Acenta.

The new Nissan Micra is quite simply a revolution. It is a radical progression from the model it has replaced, and from the trio of highly successful superminis which date back to the Micra's debut in Europe in 1983.

Longer, wider and lower than ever before, the all-new Micra has been conceived, designed and engineered with European B-hatchback consumers' requirements at the top of the agenda.

And those who have already bought one are thrilled with it. Scores and comments posted via independent reviews organisation Reevoo have revealed an impressive average of 8.8 out of 10. A third of reviewers have awarded their Micra top marks – 10 out of 10.

Key to the all-new Micra's appeal is the car's athletic and expressive exterior design, which moves the Micra name plate in a daring new direction.

The contemporary look and premium feel continues inside, with a high-quality cabin that boasts two-tone soft-touch materials as standard across the range.

With a wheelbase that's 75mm longer than its predecessor, it features segment-leading interior space for front seat occupants.

The all-new Micra is also a technology leader, with a number of features which are not only new to the Micra but new to the segment. These include Intelligent Lane Intervention, a safety system which gently corrects the Micra back on to the right path should it be required. These advanced driver assistance technologies help the Micra to a four-star Euro NCAP rating (five stars in the UK).

Also unique to Micra is the BOSE Personal audio system, which features speakers built into the driver's head rest for an immersive 360° sound experience. The new Micra is available with a wide range of personalisation options, allowing owners to modify the exterior and interior with premium components in a variety of stylish and contemporary colours.

The new Micra is also a fantastic car to drive, with a dynamic performance that is the perfect balance between agility, excitement and the secure feeling that comes with confident and predictable handling.

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Grace, pace and elegance in 'four pot' worthy of heritage

More affordable but no less eye-catching

By John Griffiths

It's a sign of the times, I suppose, that the maker of an iconic sports car can launch a new model with an engine that's actually smaller than its predecessors.

Fuel econonomy and environmental concerns have reached even this elevated sector of the new car market – and, of course, make it a little more affordable but no less eye-catching.

The car is Jaguar's F-Type, now available in coupe or cabriolet guise with a four-cylinder, two litre engine. That's right, a Jaguar, and the spiritual successor to the iconic E-Type, with only four cylinders.

But of course, back in the E-Type's heyday Jaguar didn't have the company's Wolverhampton engine plant with the technology and engineering prowess to produce such a relatively small engine with the ability to pump out 300PS (296bhp) which is more than enough to make the 'four pot' F-Type worthy of its heritage.

A 0 to 62mph sprint time of 5.7 seconds is sporting by any standards, and by coincidence it's a match for the 3.0 litre V6 F-Type, which has an extra 40PS.

The reason? Well by losing two cylinders you are also losing a little over 50kg of weight. It's weight from the right place too (the front) so it improves the car's front-rear balance to an almost perfect 50-50, bringing with it improvements in handling.

The two-litre F-Type starts from £50,745 for the coupe, £56,280 for the cabriolet.

Naturally there will always be those able and willing

The car is classically laid out as a sports car

to pay double that for the sheer power and supercar-busting performance of the 5.0 litre, 575PS V8 flagship of the F-Type range. But the four-pot has its advantages, too: real world performance on today's busy, camera covered roads, and fuel economy and CO2 emissions on a par with the Mazda MX-5 – 39.2mpg and 161g/km.

The cabin is generously proportioned by two-seater standards, with big and shaped-for-comfort sports seats in leather and suede (both electrically adjustable), a colour touchscreen controller with premium sound system, satnav and climate control.

The downsize of choosing the cabriolet is that when the electrically folding roof is down boot space is 207 litres, compared to 310 for the coupe. Not of course that loss of boot space or an extra couple of thousand pounds has ever put anyone off the lure of wind in your hair motoring.

The car is classically laid out as a sports car – front engined and rear wheel drive – without the four wheel drive option available in the V6 and V8 line-up.

It's a configuration appreciated by purists, for its feel, driver feedback and agility. And for those daunted by powerful rear wheel drive cars it has dynamic stability control and an open differential with torque vectoring to keep you safe and on the right track.

Once out of town and on the open road, you can switch to dynamic mode which sharpens up the response of the steering, throttle and eight-speed automatic gearbox. There's a manual option too, with 'change up/down paddles behind the leather-clad steering wheel. There's a switchable 'active' sports exhaust too: you can enjoy a louder, more growly soundtrack inside the car as it's generated from the induction side of the engine.

A fuel-saving stop/start system, electric mirrors, rain sensing wipers and a deployable boot lid spoiler were also standard on the £59,085 R-Dynamic convertible version tested. The price included extras such as 19-inch alloy wheels, climate pack of heated seats, windscreen and steering wheel and front parking aid.

I must confess the idea of a four cylinder Jaguar sports car had me wondering, Until I'd driven it. The turbocharged engine's smooth,linear performance and impressive turn of speed is very much in the marque's tradition of grace, pace and elegance. Owners will lose little, but gain much in terms of running costs and environmental credentials.

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HOW MUCH DO YOU REMEMBER? 60 TO TACKLE IN END OF YEAR QUIZ

Test your 2017 sporting knowledge

Who beat Andy Murray in the Australian Open?

Name this Sutton goalkeeper involved in 'Piegate'

Britain's Andrew Pozzi struck gold. At which event?

Which golfer beat Justin Rose to the Masters?

Who beat John Higgins for world glory?

Name this surprise French Open winner

JANUARY

1) World number one Andy Murray suffered a surprise defeat against which player in the fourth round of the Australian Open?

2) Whom did Dutchman Michael van Gerwen beat in the final of the William Hill PDC World Darts Championship at Alexandra Palace?

3) Serena Williams won the Australian Open women's title for her 23rd grand slam singles title, an open era record, but which player did she face in the final?

4) Which Real Madrid superstar was named best men's player at the inaugural Best FIFA Football Awards?

5) Against which Premier League side did Wayne Rooney score his 250th goal for Manchester United to beat Sir Bobby Charlton's club record?

FEBRUARY

6) England registered a 15th successive rugby union Test victory to set a new national record, with a 19-16 triumph over which Six Nations rivals at Twickenham?

7) Which team overcame a 25-point deficit to beat the Atlanta Falcons 34-28 after overtime at Super Bowl LI?

8) Name the Canada tennis player who was defaulted for striking a ball in anger that hit umpire Arnaud Gabas during the deciding rubber of the Davis Cup tie against Great Britain.

9) Name Sutton's 'roly-poly goalie' who resigned after eating a pie in the dugout during the televised FA Cup defeat to Arsenal, on which a bookmaker had offered odds for him to do so.

10) Who stepped down as England cricket captain after 59 Tests in charge? And who replaced him?

MARCH

11) Who replaced Ian Drake as the new chief executive of British Cycling?

12) Which member of Celtic's 1967 European Cup winning Lisbon Lions squad died in March at the age of 73?

13) British athlete Andrew Pozzi won gold in which event on the opening day of the European Indoor Championships in Belgrade?

14) Barcelona overturned a first-leg 4-0 deficit to beat which team 6-1 at the Nou Camp and so secure a place in the quarter-finals of the Champions League?

15) Who won the Cheltenham Gold Cup?

APRIL

16) Who was appointed captain for the British and Irish Lions' summer tour of New Zealand?

17) Who was thrown out of a Fed Cup tie in Constanta, Romania after hurling foul-mouthed abuse at the Great Britain team and journalists?

18) Which horse won the Grand National?

19) Which British boxer beat Wladimir Klitschko in 11 punishing rounds at Wembley to add the WBA and IBO heavyweight titles to his IBF belt?

20) Who beat England's Justin Rose in a play-off to win the Masters?

MAY

21) Name the winners of the 2016/2017 Sky Bet Championship title.

22) Saracens beat which French club to win the European Champions Cup final at Murrayfield?

23) Who defeated John Higgins 18-15 to win the Betfred World Snooker Championship for a third time?

24) Manchester United defeated which Dutch club to win the Europa League final in Stockholm?

25) Which team beat Wasps 23-20 after extra time in the Aviva Premiership final at Twickenham?

JUNE

26) Name the 40-1 outsider who won the Investec Derby at Epsom.

27) Which Latvian tennis player recorded a shock victory over title favourite Simona Halep to win the women's title at the French Open?

28) Which golfer won the US Open at Erin Hills.

29) Name the winners of the America's Cup in Bermuda.

30) Who beat Stan Wawrinka to win a 10th French Open tennis title success?

JULY

31) Which team beat Surrey by four wickets to win the Royal London One-Day Cup at Lord's?

32) Which golfer secured victory in the Open Championship at Royal Birkdale?

33) Who did British number one Johanna Konta lose against in the semi-finals at Wimbledon?

34) Name the Great Britain swimmer who won gold in the 100m breaststroke at the World Championships in Budapest.

35) Who defeated Marin Cilic in the final to claim a record eighth men's singles title at Wimbledon?

AUGUST

36) Hull beat which team to retain rugby league's Challenge Cup with a 18-14 win at Wembley?

37) Name the British quartet who won the men's 4x100 metres relay at the World Championships in London, where Usain Bolt pulled up injured on the anchor leg for Jamaica.

38) Which golfer won the US PGA Championship at Quail Hollow?

39) In which round did boxer Floyd Mayweather beat Mixed Martial Arts superstar Conor McGregor in their controversial bout in Las Vegas ?

40) Who defeated England to win the Women's Rugby World Cup final in Belfast?

SEPTEMBER

41) Name the cities announced as hosts of the Olympic Games in 2024 and 2028 respectively.

42) Tour de France winner Chris Froome claimed victory in which prestigious cycle race to complete a rare double?

43) Which cricket team secured a first County Championship title win since 1992?

44) Who secured her first tennis grand slam title with a 6-3 6-0 over fellow American Madison Keys at the US Open?

45) Which English bowler took his Test wicket tally to 500 against West Indies at Lord's?

OCTOBER

46) Which striker was the first player in English football to be retrospectively banned for diving.

47) Victory at the Mexican Grand Prix saw Lewis Hamilton clinch the Formula One drivers' championship. How many times has he now been world champion - three, four or five?

48) Which team did England beat 5-2 to win football's Under-17 World Cup final?

49) Who won gold for Britain in the men's pommel horse at the World Gymnastics Championships in Montreal?

50) Who beat Castleford 24-6 in the Betfred Super League Grand Final at Old Trafford?

NOVEMBER

51) Which baseball team claimed the World Series for the first time after beating the Los Angeles Dodgers in a winner-takes-all game seven?

52) Name the English golfer who won the European Tour's Race to Dubai.

53) Why was boxer David Haye forced to postpone his rematch with Tony Bellew?

54) Which team did England beat to reach the Rugby League World Cup final?

55) Name the England cricketer who was handed his Ashes debut in the first Test at the Gabba.

DECEMBER

56) Name the countries England will face in Group G at the 2018 World Cup following December's draw in Moscow.

57) Which player equalled Steve Davis' record of six UK Championship snooker titles with victory over Shaun Murphy in York?

58) Cyclist Sir Bradley Wiggins made a return to competitive action at which event during December?

59) Name the team who defeated Seattle Sounders to win the MLS Cup.

60) What was reported to have been thrown towards Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho following the derby defeat to Premier League rivals Manchester City?

Lewis Hamilton. How many titles?

Why did David Haye pull out of a fight?

The winner of the Open at Royal Birkdale. But who?

Mayweather v McGregor. Which round was it stopped?

Chris Froome celebrated a double in which race?

Shaun Murphy. UK Championship runner-up. To whom?

Answers

JANUARY
1) Mischa Zverev; 2) Gary Anderson; 3) Venus Williams, her sister; 4) Cristiano Ronaldo; 5) Stoke

FEBRUARY
6) France; 7) New England Patriots; 8) Denis Shapovalov; 9) Wayne Shaw; 10) Alastair Cook stepped down, succeeded by Joe Root

MARCH
11) Julie Harrington; 12) Tommy Gemmell; 13) 60 metres hurdles; 14) Paris St Germain; 15) Sizzing John

APRIL
16) Wales flanker Sam Warburton; 17) Romania Fed Cup team captain Ilie Nastase; 18) One For Arthur; 19) Anthony Joshua
20) Sergio Garcia

MAY
21) Newcastle; 22) Clermont Auvergne; 23) Mark Selby; 24) Ajax; 25) Exeter Chiefs

JUNE
26) Wings Of Eagles; 27) Jelena Ostapenko; 28) Brooks Koepka; 29) Emirates Team New Zealand; 0) Rafael Nadal

JULY
31) Nottinghamshire; 32) Jordan Spieth; 33) Venus Williams; 34) Adam Peaty; 35) Roger Federer

AUGUST
36) Wigan; 37) Chijindu Ujah, Adam Gemili, Danny Talbot, Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake; 38) Justin Thomas; 39) 10th round; 40) New Zealand

SEPTEMBER
41) Paris (2024) and Los Angeles (2028); 42) La Vuelta; 43) Essex; 44) Sloane Stephens; 45) James Anderson

OCTOBER
46) Shaun Miller (Carlisle); 47) Four; 48) Spain; 49) Max Whitlock; 50) Leeds

NOVEMBER
51) The Houston Astros; 52) Tommy Fleetwood; 53) Haye suffered a biceps tear while on stairs during training; 54) Tonga; 55) Jake Ball

DECEMBER
56) Belgium, Tunisia and Panama; 57) Ronnie O'Sullivan; 58) British Rowing Indoor Championships; 59) Toronto FC; 60) Milk and water

Sport

Well, what do you know? Try our 2017 sports quiz
Page 27

Boxers vie to be the last man standing

EIGHT boxers will compete for BCB's Midlands Boxing Super Series: The Super Featherweights in the new year.

Fights will take place over three nights but there can be only one winner, who will be crowned the Midlands Area Super Featherweight champion.

Old Hill's Manny Zaber, Paul Holt and Kane Baker, both of Birmingham, Chasetown's Luke Jones, Tamworth duo Louis Fielding and Josh Bailie, West Bromwich's Jack Summers and Derby's Indi Sangha will all compete to be become the last man standing.

The quarter finals will take place at Walsall Football Club on Saturday, February 10, with four fights of six three-minute rounds.

The semi-finals and final will take place later in 2018 by the time current champion, Leon Woodstock, will have vacated his crown.

"We're really looking forward to what we hope will be the first of a series of competitions that will see local fighters compete for not only local bragging rights but also a Midlands Title," said Head of Boxing at BCB, Errol Johnson.

"We are grateful to the British Boxing Board of Control and Martin Florey, Richard Vaughan and Rob Smith in particular for their support.

"We had to postpone the series but are delighted to get it back on track."

Tickets are £35 general admission, £40 on the door, and £60 VIP ringside to include buffet and waitress service. Call 01922 651414.

Gavin's frank about chances as world title fight looms

BIRMINGHAM boxing favourite Frankie Gavin has vowed there will be no more 'Fun Time Frankie' as he prepares for his biggest ever challenge and a world title fight.

The Hall Green pugilist fights for the World Welterweight championship in his home city on February 23. The former English World champion, who brought Commonwealth Gold to the Second City in 2006, will face African Bethuel Ushona in front of a packed Genting Arena.

Gavin, aged 32, said: "That's it, no more Fun Time Frankie. This is my last real big chance at a world title shot – and I'm not about to blow it."

Also appearing are fellow Brummie, Sean Davis, the former WBC International Super Bantamweight champion, Redditch's Andrew 'D'Animal' Robinson, a former Midlands Area champion, undefeated Wolverhampton bantamweight Kyle Williams, newly-crowned IBO Continental Welterweight champion Craig Morris and Tipton light heavyweight Ricky Summers.

Tickets are on sale via theticketfactory.com

Old pals' act as darts fever grips town

Jamie Hughes and Scott Baker

TIPTON has been gripped by darts fever as two of their own prepare to compete in the 2018 BDO World Championship.

Two-time semi-finalist Jamie Hughes will be joined by emerging debutant Scott Baker when the actions begins in the new year.

Locals are showing their support for two 31-year-olds, who were both pupils at the now defunct Princes End Primary School, first meeting at the age of four.

Both attended a pre-Christmas 75-man darts knockout tournament at Allen's Sports Bar, on Newell Street, where the winner, Nick Fullwell from Stourbridge, walked away with hundreds of pounds.

The 33rd staging of the BDO tournament will take place in Frimley Green from January 6-14, live on Channel Four and BT Sport.

Baker makes his worlds bow after finishing 23rd in the BDO rankings for 2017.

He'll be going up against Belgium's Andy Beatens, the current Belgium Masters and England Masters champion, in a first-to-three sets tie on Monday January 8, broadcast on BT Sport.

Third seed Hughes, a two-time worlds semi-finalist, enters the fray for the evening's line-up on January 9 in the last game of the day's schedule, taking on either Canada's David Cameron or German open qualifier Michael Unterbuchner.

PARDEW: WE NEED A BOOST

ALAN PARDEW admits his Albion squad might need a boost in the January transfer window and has refused to rule out selling Jonny Evans.

The Baggies spent Christmas in the bottom three after extending their winless streak to 18 games in all competitions with defeat at Stoke on Saturday.

Things didn't get much better for them after a dour scoreless draw against Everton on Boxing Day, despite some encouraging signs in the early stages of the game, although Salamon Rondon went off injured early in the second half, limiting his options up front.

Boost

Pardew reckons his squad does have enough quality to avoid the drop but is still hoping to freshen it up with a couple of faces.

"From what I have seen from the games we have played I would say so yes, there is (enough quality)," he said.

"Sometimes you do still need a boost in that window and we might need to look at it.

"So I have to absorb the Stoke game and then address the games against Everton and Arsenal before we see where we are.

"I am still learning and seeing things at the moment, in terms of the group we have to see how these results go in the next three or four games. And then probably react from that."

Pardew has limited funds in January and will need to offload players in order to fund major additions. Evans is a target for both Manchester giants, Arsenal and Everton, and could fetch as much as £30million in the window.

Pardew admitted he couldn't guarantee he would stay at the club, because he's been burnt making promises like that before.

"I think it would be a blow to us to lose him obviously if that was the case," said Pardew. "I lost Andy Carroll on the last day of the window and I think we'd already said he wouldn't leave so I won't go down that road again.

"I thought he (Evans) was great (on Saturday) like a number of players, we had a really good performance. We deserved something."

Albion went 2-0 down in the first half but got back into the game with a Salomon Rondon goal before Stoke wrapped up the points at the death.

"I have got to find seven wins and if we had not made the errors we made we might have got a win," said Pardew. "I am the type of manager who likes to take the game to the opposition, but I don't want us to get stretched.

"I was really disappointed we conceded with the last kick of the game because we didn't deserve that. There's a lot of things which will make me more clear in my mind about how we will get those wins following today's game."

Salomon Rondon and Jonny Evans in action, before the Venezuelan was taken off through injury

Team nets three wins on the spin

WEST Brom Basketball Club ended 2017 on a high, demolishing Trojans 93-64 on their travels.

It was the second and final meeting between the teams this season, West Brom having won the first against a side second from bottom in the league.

They hosts established a double-digit lead in the opening quarter. With Ezekiel Cameron on coaching duties due to injury, a quick timeout was called to try to halt the opposing run, and it did the trick late on in the first quarter.

A cascade of three pointers saw the deficit crumble, before the visitors took the lead by the end of the period.

The George Salter Academy-based side are currently the highest scoring team in the division, and that offensive ability was proven once again as West Brom extended the lead.

They went on to take a double-digit advantage which they refused to relinquish. Michal Banczer led the scoring with 36 points.

Things quickly boiled over in the fourth quarter for the hosts, with technical fouls being issued, resulting in even more opportunities for West Brom to net their third straight win in the league.

Stand-in coach Cameron was happy with the way his players bounced back from a slow start.

"The intensity wasn't enough in the first quarter and it showed, but throughout the game we really stepped up and showed why we are on such a good run right now," he said.

Basketball boost with 2022 Games

BRITISH Wheelchair Basketball received an early Christmas with confirmation that the 2022 Commonwealth Games will be held in Birmingham.

This means that for the first time in the history of the sport, wheelchair basketball will feature in the Games.

Paul Hudson, chairman of British Wheelchair Basketball said: "We are delighted that Birmingham has been confirmed as the host. We have had a long and successful relationship with the city, who hosted our World Championships in 2010. We are looking forward to the opportunity to showcase our sport to a whole new audience."

★★★

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